

BATTLE DAYS

Arthur Petterless

THE AUTHOR OF

'GOG'

22

vol.

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BY

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS book is not a sequel to 'Gog' in the ordinary sense of the word, because none of the same characters are involved, but it is nevertheless a continuation of that story. In 'Gog' I presented a picture of war as it worked around the individual. In the present work I have tried to give a picture of war, also true, but on very much ampler lines, including the doings of soldiers of all ranks and arms, both on their military and human side. The endeavour has been to create progressively such a series of situations as would fairly represent modern war as I have seen it, in its many workings and phases, these situations being accompanied by such indications of the methods of battle-control and connection as would to some extent at least visualise the way in which things happen, the extraordinary difficulties of war, and the reasons, through accident, casualties, and otherwise, why things that ought to, often don't happen. The task is obviously an extremely difficult one on account of the vast complexity of modern war and its innumerable technicalities, but I hope the result may prove interesting to some.

The work is, of course, fictional in the same sense that 'Gog' is fictional—that is to say, all characters, names of places, trenches, &c., are fictional; but, never-

theless, the whole is created out of the life and incident at the Front which I have seen. Leading characters cannot, of course, run steadily through the book as in an ordinary novel, because war involves such an enormous number of persons and arms, and it would be merely ridiculous to have one individual performing all over the place in order to satisfy the natural wish for interest in a leading character. What has been done, is to group the whole workings as happens in actual fact under the officer in supreme command.

There is nothing more to be said about the book in particular, unless to express one wish, and that is, that if it should happen that it influence any thought in any way at all, it should do so mainly by reminding some one that, amid all the horrors of war, amid all the clouds of misrepresentation, amid many changes and happenings that might appear difficult of understanding, there did exist in the days in which it was written, flaming above and through all, among thousands of devoted men and women of the free peoples of the world, a self-sacrificing devotion and a magnificence of heroism which will never be surpassed.

If the days of peace come, as we are told, to be perpetual, then there is one prayer which it will be necessary to repeat often, and that is a prayer that the glorious spirit of these days of heroism may never die.

As an illustration of what is meant, it is worth while, I think, to trace three simple incidents just as samples (one mildly humorous, one more stirring, and one magnificent) of that spirit as it shone forth in the early days of the war.

The first, which happened in 1914, concerns that master manipulator of records and strong servant of the Empire—the recruiting-sergeant, and another.

A lengthy queue, seeking only to be enlisted in the battalions of death or glory, contained a powerful oldish man. When he reached the recruiting office and the doctor, he said firmly that his age was thirty-two. The doctor gazed at his grey hairs and hesitated, but the sergeant had no doubts. He put the man's name down.

As the recruit was leaving the office, the sergeant winked solemnly. "Nothing like the Army for keeping a man young," he said.

As he said that, the recruit stared, and the sergeant spoke again. "Growing younger every day, Tam," he remarked.

Tam gasped. "Man, I never knew you!" he said.

"Wheesht!" said the sergeant.

The recruit went out. The sergeant winked again. "He's fifty-seven if he's a day," he remarked.

Yes. Fifty-seven, and returning to the colours triumphant. Not too old!

So he went away smiling, to learn the new drill, to grouse in the old way, and to fight "Hunnibalism."

The second incident was narrated by a Colonial officer. It shows how the wonderful spirit swept across the world.

The place was a little colony, an island of the seas, and when the war broke out the battle-scene seemed far away. The colony was thrilled by the thought of war—yes, but they hardly stirred for a time. They needed something to awake them.

It happened.

The Hun bombarded the east coast of England, and the cables carried the news across the seas.

That did it.

A thrill that was almost magical in its intensity swept

the colony. In every mind there was but one thought. The sacred shores had been bombarded. The land that was dearer to them than any other land was being threatened.

The result was immediate. A meeting of every Britisher in the place was called right away, and it was resolved—it was resolved *unanimously*, not one dissentient voice—that every fit man should go, and go at once.

Two days later when men met each other on the streets they did not ask, “Are you going?” or, “When are you going?” but, “Have you got a passage on the first boat?”

And so they poured forth every man of them, rich men and poor men, big men and little men, tearing across the seas, first-class, second-class, steerage, stokers, anyhow, so be they might reach in time and be in the first row of them that should fight.

Were these not glorious days when men lived greatly!

My last incident concerns one of those who died greatly.

It happened at the Battle of Jutland, when boats were sinking and men were drowning, and men might well have been pardoned for thinking of nothing but saving their lives.

As the great battle cruiser *Tiger* was charging into action at top speed, cutting a pathway through surging waters churned in raging foam, her track lay right across the part of the sea where drowning men were floating. It was not the *Tiger's* work to help them just then. It could not be so.

The men in the water knew that. The men on the *Tiger* knew it too, so the *Tiger* charged on.

And what did the drowning men in the water do,

the men whose chance of life was growing ever less 'mid the struggle and storm of battle—growing less with the very backwash of waves created by the *Tiger's* furious onrush?

What did they do?

One man at least roused himself in those cold rushing waters as the ship swept by, raised his arm and waved her on, while a glimpse of his wildly triumphant face was caught for a moment. His lips were moving, and there was no mistaking his cry. He was shouting gloriously, "Go it, *Tiger!*"

Did ever gladiators say their *morituri* more splendidly than he?

I say again, whatever other alterations there may be, at all costs let not that glorious spirit die!—That spirit of which incidents such as these were but as one in ten thousand.

A. F.

PART I.

THE FORERUNNERS

CHAPTER I.

STRAWS.

THE pushing season seemed still afar off, and nothing was farther from the mind of Captain Hazlitt than the idea of a push.

It was a cold and dismal day in January, and the trenches were as sodden and muddy as the most hardened trench warrior could wish. Captain Hazlitt, however, had a comparatively dry dug-out in which there were two tolerable beds, made from the remains of various wooden articles with sacking nailed on the top, all done by the industry of a useful batman.

The second in command of the company was reclining on one of the beds, while the company commander sat on the edge of the other. He was placidly engaged in cutting from a magazine a Kirchner print of a saucy-looking damsel. Apparently he intended to decorate the walls of the dug-out with this artistic creation. A few other pictures already on the walls testified to the homage paid by successive occupants of the dug-out to beauty in feminine form.

Tastes were obviously varied both as to colour and form, but the net effect of the decoration certainly tended to relieve the rather gloomy interior of the place.

When the captain came to the hanging or nailing

stage of the decoration, Travers, the second in command, woke up to take a languid interest in the proceedings.

"Better hang her above the brown girl," he observed reflectively.

"No," said Hazlitt. "I'll hang her over here where my eyes will light upon her when I wake." The last part of the sentence was spoken in tones of genial satire.

"Haw! Haw!" said Travers cynically. "The romance of a company commander. He first saw a portrait of the lady in a dug-out on the Somme. Smitten *toot sweet*, he straightway obtained ten days' leave from the Brigadier [and I don't think!], who readily admitted the urgency of the case. While on leave they were married quietly at Podlem-by-the-Sea. Reading, left to right, portraits of the bridesmaids, Miss Hokey Pokey, Miss Chaser, Miss Snookey Ookums. Note the bride's smile."

"Yes, old bird," said Hazlitt meditatively. "Upon my soul this war almost tempts one to get married just for variety. After two blinking years of trench warfare interspersed with stunts, one might do anything."

"True," murmured the other; but he yawned and fell asleep again.

Having finished the erection of the print, the captain sat down and gazed on his work until his ear caught the sound of the ticking of the buzzer instrument from the adjacent signallers' dug-out.

Then he waited.

Shortly after a signaller entered with a pink form, which he handed to the captain.

Travers awoke to look on with interest.

Hazlitt gazed at the form and then made a noise with his lips like "Whoo!"

"Is it as bad as that!" Travers commented.

"The Corps Commander, old thing!" said Hazlitt.

"No!"

"Every time!" He read the message: "The Corps Commander will visit the trenches at twelve o'clock to-day. Company commanders will see that their trenches are in thoroughly clean condition, and that every man can be accounted for, and that all arms are in good order. Company commanders will meet the Corps Commander at the entrance to their trenches, and all platoon commanders will be with their platoons. A.A.A. Acknowledge."

Hazlitt looked up. "We'll need to get busy," he said.

Travers nodded.

"You'll need to get up and push around right away. Strafe along the trenches and bustle everybody up. Get every blasted tin can and scrap of rubbish out of sight somewhere, and whatever you do, don't forget the sanitary arrangements. Spread creosote all over the place, for that's his special touch. The Corps Commander's Dentler, and he's the great latrine general—specialist in stinks. If he comes across anything from a dead rat to an uninterred beetle and not creosoled, he positively hurls courts-martials about. So get busy."

"Right-o! I'll buzz off!"

Hazlitt proceeded to write the acknowledgment of the message. As he did so, he started. Travers had not gone.

"Here, I say!" he exclaimed. "It's not the Corps Commander. It's the Army Commander—isn't it, signaller?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that writing's pretty rotten. I misread 'Corps' for 'Army.'"

"Yes, sir. I'll tell Figgett, sir."

Hazlitt turned to Travers again. "The Army Commander is General Drakelin. I don't know what his special stunt is, but you'll just have to be generally active!" Hazlitt mused. "Depends what he's coming for. . . . I wonder. . . . I never saw an Army Commander in the trenches before, but he's only recently appointed. . . . Probably doing the new broom touch!"

Travers nodded. As he went out Hazlitt remarked, "I'll take a stroll round myself later. Tell them the Army Commander is coming, and get them to buck into things."

At four o'clock in the afternoon Hazlitt stood at the entrance to his company's trenches, gazing along in the direction from which the general was expected. Scouts had also been posted farther along to convey the earliest information of his arrival in case of any unexpected occurrence.

Hazlitt felt not entirely free from anxiety. Vast exertions had been made all day to bring both men and trenches to a high state of cleanliness and order, but at the back of his mind there were lingering doubts. Some of those tin cans had been concealed somewhat hurriedly, &c., and if the Army Commander was one of the lynx-eyed pattern, well—they were "for it." There was another general of Hazlitt's acquaintance who, in the language of a certain old soldier who had suffered, was possessed of "the nose of a pointer bitch." If General Drakelin was of that type, one could never tell what he might unearth.

At 4.10 the magic words were passed along, "He's coming."

Hazlitt passed on the message, and every man dusted his rifle for the last time, reflected inwardly on the troublesome nature of generals, outwardly made his

countenance inscrutable, and in military phrase pulled himself together to look like a soldier.

At 4.15 the procession came in view, rather an amazing procession, containing two generals, staff colonels, staff majors, an artillery commander, and several other officers. Private Souter remarked after he had seen the glory of the procession, that if the Huns had dropped a shell in the right place they'd have made a fine haul.

As the procession reached Hazlitt, General Drakelin was speaking to the officer behind him in cool but animated tones. "So far as we have gone," he was saying, "the situation here squares exactly with my impression of it."

The staff officer assented. At the same moment the battalion colonel came forward.

"This is Captain Hazlitt, sir."

"Ah, how do you do?" General Drakelin shook hands. While he spoke he looked keenly at the company commander with two somewhat fierce eyes. "Have you been long out?"

"Since 1915, sir."

"Ah, then, you know the business?"

"I have had a fair experience."

"Yes. . . . And you've got a military cross I see."

Hazlitt bowed.

"Where did you get that?"

"At Loos, sir."

"Ah . . . good—" General Drakelin stared at the captain as if he were weighing up all the possibilities of the man. "Good," he repeated eventually. "Then lead on to the observation post at K 4."

Hazlitt led on. As he did so the general talked. "Have you a good company—good men?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, you have." The general spoke rather grimly.

As they passed on, he stopped to talk to a man standing on sentry. "Are you the sentry?"

"Yes, sir." At the same time the man stood to attention, and his heels clicked as if on parade even on the slippery mud-board on which he was standing.

"Do you get your food up all right here?"

"Yes, sir." The man's eye never wavered under the piercing glance, notwithstanding the fact that he had known many times of cold food and scanty food. He was one of the best soldiers in the company, one of those who endure.

"Good," said the general, and passed on.

A minute later they came to the observation post.

The general made himself comfortable in the post, as far as that might be, and then gazed earnestly through his glasses on the country around.

While he gazed, junior members of the staff in the rear talked to each other in whispers.

"He's a terrible man," said a staff captain, as he scraped a cake of mud off the sole of his top-boot.

"Who? The tiger?" queried a major to whom he had spoken.

"Who else? . . . Nobody else would do it. Just fancy bringing us up in all this filth, and absolutely unnecessary too. He could just as well see from his maps and plans, and anyway he could have got a report about it."

"I don't know about that," said the major. "We don't know what's at the back of his mind. And apart from that, it jolly well goes to show that he's got 'guts' in him, and I'm sure the troops would a great deal sooner fight under a general who comes and sees for himself, even if it is risky, than under the other kind."

"Copy-book maxims, old bird," said the staff captain idly.

"No. Napoleon's."

The staff captain smiled.

At that moment General Drakelin rose from his survey, handed his glasses to a staff colonel and waited. Other officers in turn inspected.

At the conclusion Drakelin merely said, "That's all. We can go home now."

The procession about turned, and went backward. As they passed the entrance to the company dug-out, the general stopped.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Company headquarters, sir."

The general entered. "Ah, ha," he said as he entered. "Luxury! Luxury!! . . ." He gazed round the room. "Bedsteads, pictures of women, port wine, . . . luxury! luxury!"

As he spoke, he gazed at Hazlitt in half-amused fashion. "I thought I'd lay my finger on a weak spot somewhere."

Hazlitt was not very certain whether the comment was serious or not. The mention of port however gave him a cue, and with rather a hesitating gulp, he said, "Will you have a glass of port, sir?"

The general laughed. "Ha! ha!" he said. "And you wish to intrigue me too——"

Hazlitt was hastening for the bottle. "Well, well," said the general. "I hope it won't disturb your mess arrangements."

"Not a bit, sir."

"Well, thanks very much. But nobody else——" he cried laughingly, waving the staff backwards. "The pampered staff are not to be allowed to drink all your nourishment."

The general seemed in excellent humour.

After the port had been disposed of, he turned to

go. Before actually leaving, he spoke to Hazlitt again. "Just one thing," he said, "before I go. You've got a good company, good men, well-kept trenches, and all that. . . . But do you think there's a weak spot anywhere?"

Hazlitt stared in doubt. The general resumed quite sharply. "What about the offensive?"

"The offensive!"

"Yes. What have you done to the Hun in the last few days to bring the war nearer to a conclusion?" The general's voice was quite stern.

Hazlitt was taken aback.

Drakelin's fierce figure seemed, without speaking, to be pronouncing condemnation.

"We've bombed the . . ." Hazlitt's voice was uncertain, and he was not allowed to complete.

"No matter," said the general. "I've no doubt you've done something. But have you done enough? Have you done all you could? That's the point. And that's where the danger of trench warfare lies. Men tend to grow weary and fed-up, as the saying is. The trenches are not Zion, but to use a Biblical phrase, men tend to be at ease in Zion with comfortable headquarters, and are apt to let the Hun alone if he doesn't bother them. But that's not war. . . . So remember! You must be offensive!!"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! I know you understand, and I won't say more. But I'll expect to see your name coming through from the battalion to the brigade, from the brigade to the Division, and from the Division to me, and when I see it, I'll say to myself 'there's my friend Captain Hazlitt doing his duty.'"

General Drakelin gazed at the captain, smiled, and then held out his hand.

"Good-bye to-day, and good luck to you."

"Good-bye, sir."

The general and staff disappeared.

Two hours later the battalion commander came round to Hazlitt's dug-out. The colonel's face was beaming.

"Congratulations, Hazlitt," he exclaimed as he entered. "The general was delighted with his visit to-day, and especially with your company. Said it was the best in the line, and he merely talked to you about the offensive on the principle that 'whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.'"

"I'm awfully glad, sir."

"Yes, so am I. . . . And that glass of port positively put a finishing touch to the thing."

"Yes, sir. It's vintage port."

"Excellent," said the colonel. "Got it sent from home, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir." In the circumstances the colonel felt inspired to try the port himself.

Later in the evening, Hazlitt sat talking to Travers, discussing the events of the day.

"He's absolutely right," said Hazlitt meditatively. "Our weak spot is our lack of the offensive spirit."

Travers had not come under the spell of the general's personality to the same extent, and he was not so sure. "It's all very well to be filled with the offensive spirit when you live ten miles behind the line," he remarked, "and merely engineer other people into doing the dirty work, but for us it's another story."

"True," said Hazlitt, "but it's what we're here for."

"Oh, well, we'll get plenty of the offensive when the season opens," said Travers.

Hazlitt assented. "And I think it's going to be somewhere about where we are too," he added.

"Had to-day's show anything to do with that, do you think?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Hazlitt.

"It was *some* caravanserai," said Travers. "Haven't seen so many martial breasts covered with so much parti-coloured ribbon for a long time. I counted one V.C., not to mention numerous other things that looked like C.M.G.'s or C.I.E.'s."

CHAPTER II.

PIONEERS.

THE coming and going of the caravanseraï passed from the minds of Captain Hazlitt and his company, or remained only as a recollection of a temporary variant on the humdrumness of trench life. Why the procession had come; why it had gone? These were questions the answer to which was buried in the unfathomable depths of the minds of an uncommunicative staff. Cynical persons might have referred to concealment by "shallows" rather than "depths."

To the casual observer of the progress of the war in these regions, there were other things that happened in these days, things that might have attracted attention or might not. Some of them were very small affairs, some quite extensive. But they all meant something. Modern war is such a marvellous affair of great things and events built up on a vast accumulation of individual activities—each small in its own way, but as organised and seen by the directing brain, forming a stupendous whole, or in strategic language, a concentration.

Mr Jenkins, a lieutenant in the 14th Rochester Pioneers, thought nothing whatever about the principles of war, or the question of the mass of manœuvre, or any abstract matter at all, when he arrived at the shattered hamlet called "Gawblimey." The proper name

of the place was Goerblessen, but by the processes of war and the genius of successive soldiery, it had readily acquired a more pronounceable name. He arrived there with a few N.C.O.'s and men on an afternoon about a fortnight after General Drakelin's visit to the trenches, which were about twelve miles away from that spot.

The questions which occupied Mr Jenkins' mind were (1) billets, and (2) food. On both these matters his casual survey of the surroundings did not appear to afford satisfaction to his practised eye. Indeed he indulged in a monologue half to himself, half addressed to a Sergeant Bracknell who was standing beside him.

"Thought as much . . . dump us down again in a ——— wilderness, miles from anybody or anything, and leave us to sink or swim. . . . Mighty good job we took the chance of feeding at Vrillière . . . we can eat grass now until the company comes, and not much of that."

The sergeant stared in gloomy silence at the three shattered houses which composed the hamlet.

"Well . . . suppose we'd better get on."

"Yes, sir."

Jenkins proceeded to inspect the three houses. At the end he said, "We can rig up some wooden shanties with the spare wood and sleep there to-night. That's the best that can be done."

"Yes, sir."

"Meantime, tell the cook to get busy, and make some tea. Fortunately there's plenty of wood."

"Yes, sir."

About a quarter of an hour later, Jenkins sat among the ruins of one of the cottages. He was seated on a pile of stones which had fallen from the wall of the house, and he could on occasion gaze upwards to the sky through a shattered portion of the roof. One of the rafters hung down to within about six feet of his

head in somewhat ominous fashion, but he did not disturb himself with possibilities of death by falling rafters.

As he sat, he drank strong tea out of an enamel tin mug, and munched a piece of hard bread and margarine.

After he had finished his tea, he put down his mug and lay backwards in a comfortable position which brought the sky and the hanging rafters both prominently to his notice.

An unusual touch of blue in the sky and the possibility of danger from the rafter, together tended to make him contemplative, and as he lay he mused on the strangeness of the life that was continually dumping him in out-of-the-way places and finding him curious occupations.

"What it is to be a pioneer!" he muttered. Any one who had seen him just then, and had said the same thing with reference to Mr Jenkins, would have laughed, for he was almost stout, jolly in appearance, and looked the very antithesis of his present surroundings.

His musings carried him even further. "Why did I ever become a pioneer?" he queried to himself. The thought made him stare vacantly upwards. Eventually his mind carried him back in search for a reason to a day in 1914 when he quitted his occupation as a railway engineer and took to army pioneering.

He did not mentally inquire further. It seemed useless to do so.

In the adjoining cottage he heard the sounds of hammering. Evidently the men had finished their tea and were building the shanties—their temporary home.

He laughed softly at the thought. "Home!" Half

a dozen planks, some sacking, and a hard floor, with plenty of fresh air. How odd it all seemed, and he had been doing the same thing for years now.

The thought of home switched his mind on to another matter. He raised himself slightly and took an envelope from his breast pocket. From the envelope he withdrew a photo.

The portrait showed a slender wisp of a girl in a white dress, with brownish hair and a slightly roguish smile.

As he gazed on the portrait, Jenkins clearly approved of the mischievous-looking damsel.

All which may seem to have nothing to do with war. And yet it has, for without these side-scenes thrown in, any picture of war is utterly untrue, since love and laughter are always competing side by side with death and tears.

While Jenkins gazed on the photo, his mind was far away from war and the troubles of billeting. The fact that he was one part of a mighty organisation that was making great moves through instruments such as he, was forgotten, or perhaps unknown.

All that *he* had to do with, was his immediate job, and when that was done, in his moments of spare time, war did not preclude sentimental reflections.

Nor did war interfere with his sleep, for the shanty and the floor enabled him to rise on the following morning and get to business feeling quite fresh.

During the day a company of men arrived with waggons and tools.

Mr Jenkins spent a considerable part of the morning laying out a camp of considerable dimensions.

During the afternoon more men belonging to a labour battalion arrived on some motor-lorries.

By the evening of that day, many rows of tents had

been erected on ground where there had before been nothing but waste.

On the following day, strange rows of posts began to appear around the camp, afterwards coils of barbed wire were unrolled and whipped around the posts, until eventually the whole camp was enclosed. At the same time men were digging channels for drains, erecting wooden huts for cook-houses, and numerous other sorts of houses.

All this varied activity proceeded under the direction of Mr Jenkins, and as everything proceeded up to time, and the results were good, it would appear that sentiment in no way interfered with Mr Jenkins' efficiency.

He himself derived considerable satisfaction from the progress of the work, which perhaps justified him in humming a selection from the "Blinkin' Pioneers."

“When there ain’t no other fellers that ’d like the ruddy job,
When the water’s over knee-deep, and the mud would make
you sob,
When the engineers is restin’, with the trenches swept away,
You can put your shirt upon it, that the Brigadier ’ll say,
Where are—the blinkin’ Pioneers?”

Every arm of the service has its own particular form of pride, usually justifiable, and the men of the crossed rifle and pickaxe do many things to justify their name of pioneer. Hence the verse.

About a day after the camp had been completed, Ching Ching came to Gawblimey.

Perhaps Ching Ching was not his real name, but nobody knew any better.

The happy but somewhat inscrutable smile on his face had different results, mostly, however, friendly.

Casual pioneers moving along the road saw him

through the barbed-wire fence extending in front of his tent.

Ching Ching smiled.

Probably the pioneer smiled too, or perhaps cried,

“Cheery-o, old thing,
Cheery-o, Chin, Chin.”

If the pioneer was going away, he probably also said, “Good-byee!”

The suspicious pioneer, or one of a superior turn of mind, might scowl, referring not too amiably to “the heathen Chinees.”

If the pioneer were a scholar with a knowledge of poetry (quite a common thing in these armies), and if he doubted the inscrutable smile, he probably remembered the well-known lines anent the smile on the face of that heathen Chinees who played cricket on iniquitous lines.

But whatever happened, Ching Ching smiled interminably on. He had one phrase which appeared to be his method of securing an introduction to all the world. He held out his hand and said, “Cigarette, Ching Ching?”

As he made that remark without failing to every one he saw, and as the kind-hearted frequently supplied the much-desired cigarette, he must either have been an enormous smoker, or else have concealed a remarkable amount of tobacco about his untidy person.

That Ching Ching should have arrived at this stage to do his share in the great work, is in itself a romance of the war. His life at other times was spent in an area a mile or two square, as a labourer on the land in the province of Shan Tung. Whether the hope of gain, or the prospect of adventure, or a mere happy irresponsibility had lured him from his native haunts, is un-

known. Perhaps a mixture of all. The immediate cause had been a recruiting poster outside a mission-station, the contents of which had been explained to him as meaning food, wealth beyond his wildest dreams, and travel. The first two were intelligible, the rest——

Anyhow he had come, and the specially remarkable thing about him was that he had spent some time on the way across, floating about the ocean. His description of that event was not lucid or definite, but, accompanied by gesticulation, his meaning was fairly clear. The words he used were something like this——

“Muchee boatee . . . ploopa bang . . . Ah, poof!” These words were allied to two hands, first curved upwards to indicate explosion heavenwards, and then fingers pointed downwards to indicate sinking.

The boat on which he had come, although convoyed, had been sunk by a submarine. Ching Ching had probably been rescued by a destroyer.

That accident had in no way soured his temper, as his placid smile testified. Perhaps he had discovered the “ploopa bang” story to be such an excellent “cigarette” procurer, that present advantages in that line quite outweighed past temporary inconvenience.

On the morrow after his arrival in Mr Jenkins’ area, Ching Ching and his friends went forth to work, and they toiled from day to day. Whether they thought anything about their work, or whether they simply accepted each piece of work as their lot, Mr Jenkins never knew. He sometimes wondered as he stared at those inscrutable faces. Whatever they thought, they toiled on, cutting divots, carrying wood, digging, making drains, pushing barrows, and in general doing all such things as Mr Jenkins and others like him demanded.

One incident only remained in Mr Jenkins’ mind when he had finished these works, and that was a

recollection of Ching Ching as an obstruction. That happy soldier of labour had sat him down to rest, as I fear he frequently did, upon some wood in a position not too obvious to the superintending public. Unfortunately the wood was required, and the fact that Ching Ching was inconspicuously poised upon one end of that wood proved an obstruction, a thing which attracted the attention of an active corporal of works, who (contrary to the laws of labour battalions, but conformably, it may be, to instinctive wisdom) endeavoured to apply the front portion of his boot to the rear portion of Ching Ching. Unhappily for the corporal, he merely kicked the toe of his boot against wood and hurt himself. Ching Ching he did not hurt at all, and that inscrutable Chince laughed with glee.

Dignity for the corporal was difficult in these circumstances.

Ching Ching bore no ill-will, and the last remark that Jenkins heard from him was, "Cigarette, Ching Ching?" addressed either to the corporal in an attempt to arrive at a basis for understanding, or in a casual address to himself.

The corporal did not meet these overtures, if intended for him, but employed language of a robust and practical character.

When Ching Ching and his friends had finished their work, a line composed of dots and dashes, and on one of General Drakelin's maps marked "proposed road" was turned into a completed line. Also there were various other alterations on that map.

That was only one road.

But Ching Ching, when he did his daily task, probably thought nothing about his part in the scheme of things. He lived from day to day, saying in his heart,

"Take no thought for the morrow, neither what thou shalt eat nor what thou shalt drink, for the mad British who are always working and making us work, know that I have need of all these things, and will provide for their own reasons.

"Their mad soldiers will provide cigarettes."

Of the great war going on up in the front he knew little, but he seemed to find the traffic on the roads fascinating to watch. As he had probably never even seen a railway train before he left Shan Tung, and had certainly never seen a big gun or an aeroplane, it is not surprising that he found life interesting.

CHAPTER III.

THE PADRE.

CHING and his companions endeavoured to carry on their work in a quiet inoffensive way. At ordinary times the opening of new roads is generally heralded by a flourish of trumpets on the local orchestra, accompanied by illuminating paragraphs in the newspapers on the advance of civilisation and the progress of some district in particular, not omitting tributes to the engineering skill of the local magnate.

Not so in war. Mr Jenkins' work passed unrewarded, except in so far as his pay might be said to compensate, and the world heard not a whisper of the new roads. Yet it is true that literally the face of the country was being changed. Roads sprang into being where before there were none. Tracks appeared across marshland. Bridges came into being that could carry artillery over streams that till then had known only cart-bearing means of passage. Light railways carried their little puffing engines and trucks across fields, through woods, behind ruined villages, and in half a dozen curious places.

In peace these changes would have been regarded as little short of miraculous. In war, the whole was but an event—a thing to be concealed from the enemy so far as might be.

For that end, in connection with some of the roads and field tracks, light swaying poles or branches were erected in front or beside them bearing screens of camouflage, concocted of various sorts of material, part real, part artificial, but all more or less like foliage.

But these devices only applied to roads near to the fighting line, and which offered possibilities of remaining undiscovered.

Strangely, perhaps, the Hun appeared to display little interest in all the work that was going on. Perhaps he was unaware of it, and lulled to sleep by the comparative quietness of that part of the line at the time.

It appeared as if he was short of flying machines for reconnaissance purposes. An occasional iron-crossed plane did indeed fly over the British lines, but usually did not penetrate far, before being driven back either by the anti-aircraft guns or by the activity of counter-planes. However, these are not the only means.

About this time the brigade to which Captain Hazlitt belonged—the 971st Brigade—came out of the line for a rest, and his battalion, the Garelochs, were billeted near Gawblimey.

When they arrived they found that a new padre had been attached to them.

He arrived one afternoon, somewhat late, in a car sent from the brigade office.

The padre shook hands with Colonel Grayling, who commanded the Garelochs, and they sat down to tea. The colonel said comparatively little. He was not a man of many words, and the padre talked little too.

After the colonel had politely expressed the hope that he would find a comfortable billet, and commended him

to the care of the adjutant, the colonel rose from tea and went out.

The adjutant, Captain Blacklaw, was a pleasant fellow, and found a certain relief in seeing a new face. He chatted a little to the padre.

It appeared that the padre had not come out from home, but had been working in hospitals at the base for some time. His name was Molesworth, and he was a Cambridge man.

"Do you know any of the Molesworths of Bellingdale?" queried the adjutant casually.

"Ah . . . no . . . I'm afraid I don't," said the padre.

"They're a well-known family in the Molesworth connection," the adjutant murmured.

"Um!" said the padre meditatively, "I'm afraid——"

"Oh, I quite understand," said the other genially. "One meets so many people that——"

"Yes . . . oh yes," assented the padre.

The adjutant stared at the padre absent-mindedly. That gentleman was cutting a piece of bread, and Blacklaw noticed that he had large and somewhat rough hands. The padre's head was also large, rather what one would call of the bullet type. Yet his voice sounded almost like that of a mincing curate.

"You belong to the——?"

"The Church of England," said the padre.

The adjutant stared still! He happened to glance at the assistant adjutant, Penders by name, and found him also gazing earnestly at the padre.

The adjutant reflected inwardly that there had probably been some mistake again. It was true that they had been notified that another padre was coming, but why send a Church of England man when about eighty per cent of the Brigade were Presbyterians?

"More red tape efficiency," he murmured, as he left the mess-room. But he was busy at the time and forgot about the matter.

It was not until he met the assistant adjutant again that he thought anything more about the matter.

"Isn't he a queer blighter, the new padre?" remarked Penders.

"Queer?"

"Yes—a Church of England man sent to us—that's unusual—and——"

"Oh yes. No doubt we'll get word in a day or two that we've received the wrong one, and to send him back first post in exchange for the correct pattern."

"Oh . . . I daresay——"

"Nothing else, is there?"

"No," said Penders meditatively. "Though he's got a rotten tunic in the way of fit, and he seems a trifle awkward."

The adjutant stared. He had thought the man odd himself. But after all, he reflected, one was always running against odd people in this war. "Does seem rather a fish out of the water," he remarked. "But as the brigade sent him, we'll have to keep him till they find out their mistake, I suppose."

"Yes," said Penders. He seemed contemplative, but he went out shortly after.

At the entrance to the camp he saw the sentry on guard, and walked over to him.

"How long have you been on guard, sentry?"

"Since an hour, sirr."

"Ah. Did you see a car arrive here this afternoon?"

"No, sirr. It was the sentry afore me, sirr."

"Ah, thank you." Penders turned towards the guard tent.

"Are you there, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you get the sentry who was on before the present one to speak to me?"

"Yes, sir."

The sentry appeared immediately.

"Sentry, did you see a motor-car arrive this afternoon?"

"Yes, sirr."

"Do you know the brigade car?"

"No, sirr."

"Well! what sort of car was this you saw?"

"A big car, sir. Aa think it was a dark-blue sort of car."

"Oh! Who was driving?"

The sentry paused and meditated. "Aa think it was a soldier, sirr."

"Did a padre arrive with the car?"

"Yes, sirr. He asked if this was the place, and said he was comin' to stay."

"Oh!" Penders meditated. "The brigade car is blue," he muttered. "Expect it's all right, and the padre's just an oddment of officialism dumped on us by mistake. But he did strike me as a queer blighter."

The assistant adjutant dismissed the matter from his mind, and strolled off to his billet. While these things had been occurring, the new padre had remained in the headquarter mess-room by the fire. He had the room to himself, and any one who had seen him might have concluded that he was glad to be alone.

Dinner that night passed off quietly. The padre sat at the foot of the table and said little. It struck the assistant adjutant that the new parson was painfully polite in passing the salt and other articles of consumption.

The colonel made few remarks, and only addressed

himself once to the padre. He remarked good-humouredly, "Afraid you'll feel a bit strange here at first, as we haven't too many Church of England men."

The padre perhaps demurred. "Oh, I'm sure I'll be quite at home in a very short time," he said politely.

The colonel said nothing, and the adjutant began to talk of another matter.

On the following morning, however, after breakfast, the padre appeared to have been impressed by observations that had been made, and he approached the adjutant.

"Do you think, sir," he queried, "that there could have been any mistake regarding my being sent here? Because it does seem singular that I should have been sent to this unit. If there were an English brigade in the district, perhaps——" The padre left the suggestion to the adjutant's imagination.

The adjutant mused. "The 71st Brigade is only about five miles away," he remarked thoughtfully. "Their drafts detrain at the same station, and they're an English brigade."

The padre waited thoughtfully. Then he raised his hand and exclaimed suddenly, "That must be it! nine seven one . . . seven one. The numbers so like have been confused in the wire, and I have come to the wrong brigade."

The adjutant stared. Just for a moment it seemed to him as if, when the padre exclaimed, his accent and words had sounded foreign. The change was very slight, but——

The adjutant continued to stare. "It might be so," he said, "but we were certainly informed that some one of your cloth was coming here, and the name was Molesworth, for I looked it up last night."

"Ah!" The padre seemed almost disappointed. His

sudden animation had abated, and he spoke again in ordinary tones. "How far from here did you say the 71st Brigade was?" he queried.

"About five miles."

"I might walk across to them and inquire, or if you could kindly provide a horse, I could get there quickly and come back, and——" The Reverend Molesworth had a habit of leaving his suggestions half completed.

The adjutant's mind at that moment was not too clear about the padre. On the one hand, the adjutant was busy with other matters, and the padre was simply an incidental nuisance, whom to get rid of would be a blessing. At the same time the orderly-room and the telephone were about three hundred yards away. The adjutant could hardly communicate with the brigade to find out about the padre except by going to the orderly-room and telephoning himself. Besides, he was doubtful about communicating with the brigade at all, because the brigade headquarters at the moment were formed of individuals of the "touchy" order, who had a habit of remarking, "You've got your orders. Carry them out." Well, he had a definite order now.

Altogether, it didn't appear to the adjutant that there could be much harm in letting the padre have a horse, and allowing him to fill in the morning by going on a probably useless errand. And the transport officer happened to be standing near.

"Have you a horse you can give the padre for a ten-mile run?"

The transport officer looked dubiously at the burly Molesworth, as if estimating his equestrian possibilities. "Might have Jenny," he said eventually.

"All right," said the adjutant.

"It can do no harm, anyhow," he said pleasantly to the padre.

"No, indeed. And thank you so much," said the padre. "I feel so——"

"Yes, yes," said the adjutant. "I quite understand." Then he moved off, glad to have the padre satisfactorily disposed of until he should have an opportunity of inquiring at brigade.

The padre disappeared on the back of Jenny about ten o'clock.

It was about 10.15 before the adjutant had completed orderly-room and his other morning work.

He had another matter on which to speak to brigade, and after he had disposed of it, he raised the question of the padre. He had the less difficulty in doing so, as his conversation with the brigade major that morning had been singularly genial.

As he completed talking on the first matter he raised the second. "Oh, by-the-bye, did you meet the new padre before sending him on here?"

"The new padre!"

"Yes. Molesworth."

"Molesworth. Never heard of him."

"But we got a message from brigade saying he was coming, and he arrived here in the brigade car."

"Well, I know nothing of it. Just one minute." The brigade major apparently laid down the telephone to inquire.

The adjutant turned to the orderly.

"Just get me that message."

"Yes, sir."

The orderly produced a pink form.

"Hello, there!"

"Yes."

"We sent neither message nor padre."

"I hold a pink message M8, sent by D. R. on 14th,

saying that Capt. J. L. Molesworth, Brigade Chaplain, will be attached to us, and will report 15th inst."

"No such message was sent from here, and know nothing about it here." The major's voice sounded loudly on the telephone.

"Then my impression is that this chaplain's a spy. He's a queer bullet-headed fellow, and says he belongs to the Church of England."

"Then have him arrested and his papers searched right away," shouted the major.

The adjutant hesitated a moment. He mentally cursed his folly in giving a horse, but made the best of it, and informed the major. As he did so, he could hear the major cursing, not too *sotto voce*, at the stupidity of adjutants in general and himself in particular.

He felt that he had done a foolish thing himself. However, the brigade major was practical. "All right," he shouted; "I'll get on to the police for the whole area and have all the roads watched. What's the description?"

"Tall, say five feet ten—burly—black hair—square bullet head—dressed as a padre—riding a mare—fourteen hands—brown, white spot on nose."

"Good!" The description seemed to please the major. "I believe he's a man who's been wanted for some time. He's a clever devil, but I shouldn't wonder if he's delivered himself into our hands this time. . . . If he is a spy, the padre disguise is no end cute, as the Yanks say, but it may be his last."

"Hope so, sir, if he is a spy."

"Right! Carry on and do all you know to get him."

"Yes, sir."

The brigade major rung off, and immediately after spread the news straight to local military police, then

divisional headquarters, then battalion headquarters in the brigade. Thence the news flew to other police and to corps and army headquarters. In an hour's time the news was spread over fifty miles of country, and at her best speed Jenny was not good for more than ten miles or so per hour, and every road was being watched.

While these things were happening the assistant adjutant searched the quarters of the departed, but found nothing. Apparently the padre's kit was light and portable.

Nothing further happened until two o'clock in the afternoon, when a mounted policeman rode into the Gareloch Camp leading Jenny by the bridle. She was covered with sweat, and seemed very tired. She had been caught wandering in a field by herself. There had been no sign of the padre, and the 71st Brigade had never seen him or his horse.

The field in which Jenny had been caught was about eight miles from the Gareloch Camp.

Three days elapsed before the pseudo padre was caught; but he had to admit defeat in the end, because the odds were too great and the country too bare.

At the end of that time a bedraggled, haggard, and famishing padre passed through the camp on his way to confinement. His face was sullen, and he seemed exhausted. He said nothing.

At his trial he admitted that he was a German officer named Bernstein, and had studied in England. Questioned about the pink message form, he gave no information. Questioned as to the blue car, he was at first silent, but afterwards stated that he had asked the driver of a passing car to assist him on his road, and by that means he had been driven to the camp.

He remained indifferent to his fate, which he appeared to expect. At the end of the trial he made only one remark in German, "They will avenge me." As he spoke he waved his hand in the direction of the Hun lines.

When the Colonel of the Garelochs heard it he made only one remark. "Poor devil!" he said. "He deserved better, for he had courage, and he was only doing his job."

In Divisional Orders a paragraph appeared shortly after regarding spies:—

"The attention of all ranks is called to the necessity for the strictest vigilance, particularly on the part of guards, sentries, and others, in relation to all doubtful characters. The badges of rank of all stranger officers must be scrutinised, and their speech and action watched. In case of any doubt, the matter should be at once reported.

"Cases have been known in which enemy spies have moved within our lines unchallenged while wearing some form of uniform. It is to be noted that in these cases there is nearly always some inaccuracy by which the fraud can be detected."

However, there had been no inaccuracy in the case of Bernstein, except that his tunic had not been too well fitting.

The question of the method by which he arrived in that district occupied the attention of the police for a considerable time. They eventually came to the conclusion that he arrived through some form of air service to a place some way behind, that he had been able to

join some train proceeding to the fighting line, and had picked up information *en route*. How he had obtained certain detailed information remained obscure.

So far as the operations were concerned, his capture at the time was extremely fortunate, for it seemed highly improbable that he could have conveyed any information at all to his friends. Certain papers which were discovered on his person showed clearly that he was aware, or thought, that the various labour and other activities behind the line at that part were the prelude to offensive operations in that area. If he had been able to communicate even that one idea to his friends it might make all the difference; and General Drakelin, when he read the report of the proceedings of the trial and saw the other evidence, felt anxious.

Still the work was carried on, and the order was always for more care to be taken.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOUNDATIONS.

IT became obvious to Captain Hazlitt more than ever on the night of the 25th that *something* was going to happen. What the nature of that *something* was he had a fairly accurate idea.

He was coming down from the trenches through a wood, and as he stood there off the track and under a tree waiting for an opportunity to move on, he was held up by masses of men blocked in the road. They were halted in pitch darkness, with a drizzling rain falling, but while they were halted, there arose the subdued murmuring of numbers. What their immediate purpose was he did not know.

The track on which they were halted was one of the new tracks through the wood, and was not on the maps.

It is things such as these that frustrate the plans of generals.

There they were, about eight hundred men, all scattered through the wood in pitch darkness, ordered to proceed somewhere and carry on the work whatever the weather was like. And the weather was wretched for the purpose. The men slipped and slithered among the mud, and their spades and picks clattered continually despite every precaution.

Halted, some leaned against the trees, others crouched on branches, a few smoked, and the practice was spreading, because no one had given a contrary order. Yet the place was sometimes shelled and dangerous enough.

They were under the command of a captain and three lieutenants, and they all waited vaguely for the order which would enable them to move onwards, whither they knew not.

As they waited they talked out of the weariness of experience. Their voices sounded eerie in the darkness and gloom of the trees.

"Will we get there?" exclaimed a humourist, answered by a unanimous "No!"

Another took the tale up. "Are we lost again?"

"Devil a bit! We're here for the fresh air."

"—— the fresh air!" This warrior's opinion of the fresh air at that time unprintable.

"Who's for home?"

"Aw, give it a rest."

This sally produced idle laughter. The men were growing cheerful under the influence of mud, rain, and the absence of digging. Probably there was a subtle hope in their breasts that they *were* lost and that digging was "*nah pooh*" for that time. The idea of danger did not occur to them.

After a little while a warrior out of the depths began to sing in minor key—

"Take me home to blighty,
Tiddle dy tiddle dy ighty."

This, however, was too much, for a fierce voice sounded from some other part of the gloom. "Stop that d——d noise at once."

The singer ceased. There was an apologetic cough, and then silence.

A minute later another voice sounded from ahead.

"Put those cigarettes out at once! Who gave you permission to smoke? You want to have us all blown to hell in one round."

The wood relapsed into silence more profound, and darkness abysmal.

The captain at the head of the eight hundred thereafter proceeded to confer gloomily with his senior lieutenant.

"The order said that we were to march to the square at K9 B2.6. Well, as far as I can make out, we're at that square. When we got there, we were to be met by three engineer officers who were to direct the work. Well, I can't see a blasted soul. Probably they're sleeping in their confounded comfortable beds and forgotten all about us." The captain's voice was savage.

Captain Hazlitt overheard the conversation and proceeded to move towards the irate captain. As he did so, the men growled dubiously. He seemed to them to have appeared from nowhere. Perhaps he was a Hun.

"Make way there!"

The familiar words reassured the men, and he barged slowly forward.

"Is the officer commanding here?" he inquired after going a few yards.

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Captain Hazlitt, of the Garelocks, just coming from trenches."

"Oh, then you know the road." There was a note of relief in the voice.

"Yes; I heard you. If you go straight on about three hundred yards, you'll come to K9 B2.6."

"Oh, thanks awfully. I can't make out this ruddy map. We got verbal directions only, and the roads aren't on this map."

"No. They're new."

"Oh, I see."

"Yes. It's straight ahead. You come to a small square and you'll find a sign-post there marked."

"Ah, good. Thanks awfully. Beastly night, isn't it?"

"Yes. Good luck. Shouldn't have your men making too much palaver hereabouts."

"Oh, is that the idea? I did tell them to shut up and stop smoking, but didn't know it was exactly dangerous."

"Not very, but just as well to be careful."

"Right-o. You're pushing home?"

"Yes."

"Lucky man. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Captain Hazlitt departed.

As he went, he heard the order going down—"Pass the word along to advance, and don't make a noise."

"What did ye say?" inquired some one apparently deaf.

Irate answer at the pitch of an aggravated warrior's voice. "Pass the wurrd along to *advance* and don't make a noise!"

Captain Hazlitt halted to allow the column to pass, and as he did so he shook with laughter. Out in the gloom there, it seemed as if there were something irresistibly humorous in this message. Fancy passing a message along not to make a noise, and with the very voice that passes it making enough noise to be heard a quarter of a mile away.

What an army is the British army! The most wonderful and the most dauntless, yes, but also the most humour-filled that ever was, and that humour both conscious and unconscious.

As he leant against the tree, he heard still further

evidence of attention to the order. The spades and picks clanked brokenly, and men stumbled over tree roots or branches. It was impossible to avoid some noise. But the zeal of these men was so great to avoid making noise, that they had to make a noise to obey the order.

"You're making a noise," said one.

"I'm not making a noise. It's you that's making a noise," was the rejoinder.

There were sounds of men with entangled implements of labour endeavouring to extricate themselves or the implements in the darkness.

"Stop that noise!" This apparently from a sergeant.

"Clank! clank!" Heavy breathing of men struggling with natural obstacles.

"Don't hold up the column there!"

"We've got tangled up here!"

"D—n your entanglement! Come on, or we'll lose the main body."

Sounds of a fierce jerk and a sigh of relief. "Come on there." Sounds of rapid stumbling advance.

"Bang! Ugh!" Sounds of breaking branches. Apparently a man had crashed into a tree in the scurry and darkness.

"O Gawd! Aa've cut myself and aa'm all blood. . . . Aa wish we were back in our billets."

"Come on there!"

Apparently the head of the column was moving quickly.

Eventually the connecting files of the last company were abreast of the K square, and the journey was complete.

But two hours of the time for work of 800 men had been lost—that is, 1600 hours, or rather more than 66 days of one man. And General Drakelin's pro-

gramme could not afford to lose days of work at that rate.

Of course, that was only the first night of work for these men, and a certain margin was allowed for such things happening.

“Pass the word along to lead on in single file!”

The message passed down from the top, and the men continued to march under the guidance of the engineers.

Presently they emerged from the wood. The drizzling rain had ceased, and it had become slightly lighter. Out of the gloom of the trees, too, it was easier to see. That, however, was a doubtful advantage, since the man who sees can frequently be seen.

The four companies filed off in different directions—four ghostly columns of men creeping forward in the darkness, with occasional clatter, but for the most part quietly. Free from the shelter of the trees, men had actually begun to talk in hoarse whispers. And word also came—“When flares go up, every man crouch down until the trench is reached.”

Once a flare went up, flickered brilliantly for half a minute or so, then died away.

Hundreds of men remained crouching silently with faces turned down.

Nothing happened. Up and on again.

Two minutes later a machine-gun broke forth—“Rat, tat, tat, tat, tat, tat.”

Fierce and snappish, a hail of bullets swept across a road men had just passed.

The rear men indeed jumped forward as bullets pinged among stones just behind, but the gun had traversed in the wrong way. Had the bullets swept from left to right, one or two men would have been caught; but they had gone right to left, and so they

flew away from the digging party. Just the fortune of war!

Officers speculated as to whether the party had been seen by the flare-light. None could tell, certainly. The machine-gun appeared, by the sound, to be firing from a long distance away. Probably it was only a burst of indirect fire turned on the cross-road, on the chance of hitting something.

The captain thought it was not the flare. "It was that —— noise they made coming through the wood," he said grumblingly.

The parties moved forward eerily enough. It is true the line was still quiet at that point, but it is a strange thing for large numbers of men to move forward in darkness just a few hundred yards away from the enemy, and knowing that any moment the silence and darkness may be turned to shrieking destruction and flaring light.

Just picture it all for a moment. Picture the business of going through a gloomy piece of country full of bushes and shadows—picture doing so in darkness in peace-time, when there is no danger at all. Picture that piece of country over which you are walking as the burial-ground of hundreds, where every tombstone casts a shadow! Picture that ground the home of ghosts, and perhaps you may understand something of the eeriness of their work.

But add to that—add to it on a generous scale. Picture the place filled with unseen and incalculable dangers in a dozen forms—hidden enemies lurking behind those bushes (for the line is only held by out-posts); chances of death in many forms by shell, by bomb, by bullet, by gas, by shock, by steel! Add to it, further, that twenty men fell in this same place just a night ago, and then perhaps it can be under-

stood that men were glad when they came to the trench.

True, it was only two feet deep as yet; but two feet below the surface is something not to be despised, and every shovelful made it better.

"Move along the trench and spread yourselves out at two paces interval—one pick to five shovels. Get on with the work!"

"Will we take off our equipment?"

"No, you can't here. And keep your rifles where you can lay hands on them at a moment's notice. See that you don't bury them when digging."

These orders being given, the men got into their places and the work proceeded.

The Engineer officers, having pointed out the work, went home to bed; the infantry officers and infantry, commonly called the P.B.I., remained at the work of excavation.

Lieutenant Baker, in charge of the second company, found that work tedious enough. It was a raw, damp, miserable night, and there was no dug-out in the vicinity, so far as he knew, to which he could retire. He might have done a bit of digging with the men; but then that was not his job, and he couldn't superintend two hundred men digging and also dig himself.

He solved the problem by sitting down behind a bush and shivering in silence. Even a sound Burberry with fleece lining wrapped around him was insufficient to keep out the cold; and his feelings probably resembled those of a waif on the London Embankment cast there on a foggy night in December, except that he was better clad.

From time to time he burst forth from behind his bush, and moved up and down the trench encouraging the weary, "strafing" the idle, and generally adjuring

people to "get on with it"—"it" being their particular occupation, whatever that might be. Perhaps he indulged in these periodical tours as much to warm himself with the exercise as for promoting the work. But you never can tell.

Each time as he sat down behind his bush he sat with his knees up nearly to his chin, and held himself together to create the greatest warmth. On his wrist he could see the luminous hours marked on his watch and note the progress of the luminous handles, and so the hours, as they went by, seemed interminable.

He dimly wondered what he had done in some previous existence, or even in his present life, to deserve such a fate. He reflected that war was a muddy inglorious affair, and getting mighty tedious at that.

In fact he felt "fed up" with life. In that state he did not even speculate as to the occasion for his being there. That he was building a trench of a certain height, depth, and dimension, he knew: that that trench was to form part of a much longer trench he also knew. But beyond that nothing.

Nor did he very much care. He had superintended the building of many trenches, the cause whereof he knew not. So he sat in the mud, and because he thought it inadvisable to smoke a cigarette, he munched some chocolate instead at intervals until two o'clock A.M.

At that hour thousands of men (not merely the 800, but thousands of men) extended over many miles of line, picked up their rifles, either dumped their picks and spades, or carried them down to a dump, and wended their way slowly homewards.

Just imagine once again those thousands all with their rifles and bayonets and equipment, weary, muddied, bedraggled, with clothes half soaked with

rain, slipping and stumbling homeward through the woods still in darkness; after that, some marching all the way back to their billets, others, more fortunate, being carried home on the trucks of the light railways behind little hooting engines.

But of all these thousands, every one did not escape scathless. Subtract from the thousands who went up the men who came under shell fire, and some score who fell by the way through the effects of gas, and in general all those who came down on stretchers or who had fallen to fight no more.

From the private point of view all these men represented grief; from the military point of view they could only represent numbers who must be replaced, or, if not replaced, at least provided for in the programme under the marginal allowance.

The Engineers had promised General Drakelin that the system of trenches, saps, and dug-outs required would be completed on —.

So far the casualties had not exceeded expectation, and through the agency of Mr Baker and many more like him (some enthusiastic, some imperturbable, some "fed up") the work went on.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOLE.

WHILE the diggers were making trenches, Private Soulder was also working at his own particular job. He belonged to the —th Tunnelling Company. He was a tunneller by taste though not by profession; he found the work more peaceful than trench warfare, except during those periods when he came up from below and passed through the trenches on his return to billets. These occasions he did not like.

He had become a tunneller by mere accident. The infantry battalion to which he belonged had called for volunteers for the tunnelling company, and in an idle moment he had permitted the platoon sergeant to send in his name, without having any particular idea what he was applying for. He had a vague notion that the suggested post had something to do with making railway tunnels or bridges, and fancied hopefully after his application had gone in that the result might be a "cushy" job somewhere behind.

No such fortune, however, resulted.

Instead he found himself pushed rapidly to the front line and seat of trouble, to perform works of excavation, the like of which he had never seen before. At first he was, in his own words, "skeered" of the job, but time and

absence of accident reconciled him to the task, and he actually came to like it.

It was warm underneath the ground, and the burst of shells and cannonade of guns sounded far away, at least so his experience proved. Excepting for the dreadful journeys backward and forward, he would have found life not too terrible. These journeys stuck in his mind as a sort of nightmare—the creeping homewards through trenches and across fields, sometimes in the dark, sometimes by daylight, but nearly always with considerable waiting at different points till shelling had ceased; these were horrible things to think of, and he always attained the mouth of the mine where he worked with contentment, and left it with a touch of apprehension.

Down in the centre of the earth, with a light burning, it was quite warm, and mother earth seemed friendly and homely. The soil was fairly dry and firm in that part, and digging, though hard, was yet satisfactory.

Soulder was a conscientious tunneller, so that he was not troubled much by official visits. An officer descended into the bowels of the earth where Soulder toiled and checked the direction and extent of the working from time to time, but as the results appeared satisfactory, he was not much interfered with.

Indeed, Soulder's commander considered him one of the best of his men. Such is the result of aptitude and taste. Soulder, the inefficient infantryman, was quite an efficient tunneller. So much so that his fellow-workers referred to him compassionately as the "human mole."

His prehistoric ancestry must certainly have belonged to the mole variety, for even his commander had been impressed with his curious habits.

Soulder in appearance was short and dark, and his

eyes had something dreamy about them, and often seemed half shut.

One day his commander reached the end of the gallery where Soulder was working and saw no one. It was only after he had flashed his torch several times and shouted that Soulder disengaged himself from one side of the gallery and became visible. His officer was startled. There seemed something almost supernatural in this muddy identification of the man with the earth.

When he came to the top, the commander mentioned the matter with wonder. "'Pon my soul, he's the human mole right enough, that fellow Soulder. He's a positive chameleon—inserted himself into the earth in such a way that I never saw him, and fairly got the wind up—thought he was dead—done in or something—and then he uncoiled himself, and appeared out of the ground like a wizard. . . . Asked him what he was doing, and he said something about feeling for earth. . . . Lord, knows what that means, and he didn't explain."

In reality Private Soulder was at one with the earth. He felt it to be a great sheltering shield against the turmoil and ferocity of the world outside. The earth had taken him to her bosom, and he was content. At least he felt like that, and had come to forget that there was any other possibility, because the earth had always been kind.

So he toiled on and dug at his bit until he was relieved, and then dug again, and so on all day or night as it happened, and men brought wooden sills and legs with which he formed the supports of the gallery on which he worked. And between spells of work he sat or lay on the wooden boarding and rested, and was at peace, while all his old comrades in the infantry were very much at war up above. That arrangement contented him, and he was entirely placid when he lay and rested.

Curious to think of, is it not? The great war rumbled and thundered above him. Bombs thudded, shells whizzed and crashed, bullets whistled, and men died and were carried away. But Private Soulder, hidden away deep down in his hole, almost forgot there was a war, while actually in the midst of it, and lived at peace.

During all the days of his work he never heard of General Drakelin, and knew nothing about him. As regards work, if he had been told that it was his work to dig through the earth until he came out at Australia, he would have felt no surprise. All he knew was that his duty was to "go on burrowing."

Nevertheless his ignorance of the situation does not alter the fact that he was comprehended in the order which ordained that the —— Tunnelling Company would supply —— officers and —— men for a certain work; and his work was also comprehended in the time and labour schedules.

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On all previous tasks of the same kind, everything had gone well with Private Soulder, and on the present task things went well until the 15th ——, or about six weeks after the commencement of the mine.

During that time considerable progress had been made, and Soulder's work was at a point in a gallery forty or fifty feet underground. The entrance to the mine was situated in a small rising ground, where, it was concealed from the enemy even by day, and that entrance was always covered against aeroplane observation.

After entering, the mine slanted downwards and eventually turned off in several horizontal galleries, in one of which Soulder worked.

On the 15th Soulder was working as usual when a dull shaking of the earth, accompanied by a dropping

rain of small pieces of earth from the roof where he was working, caused him to pause in his task and stare around.

It was the first time in his experience such a thing had happened, and he felt uncertain. His knowledge of mining was limited to his own kind of work, and he scarcely knew what to think.

A vague feeling of possible danger rose in his breast. He listened for a few moments to hear sounds of the next man who was working along with him, a man called Tim Connolly. He was reassured by hearing the tap of working, and he himself prepared to resume work.

But at that very moment the unusual thing happened again. There was the rumbling, shaking noise, a peculiar sound as if some fearful strain were placed upon the earth, which resisted sufficiently, but was yet terribly moved by the onslaught. The rumbling was more pronounced this time, for it was nearer.

This time Soulder had no doubt. He ceased thinking of work and turned hurriedly to go. Whatever it was that caused this thing, it was something terrible, and for the first time Soulder realised that it would be an awful thing to be shut up there unseen and all alone, entombed, or crushed alive under the immense burden of earth.

The human mole sought earth no more. He started to flee.

But the earth, which up till then had always seemed friendly, was about to become grim and dreadful.

As he started to run there was the noise of a terrific shaking and bursting, an indescribably dreadful sound that seemed to set his ears tingling and his whole frame shaking in unison.

Wild fear took him and he ran as if mad. A whirl of

emotions swept him, and cold perspiration was breaking from his brow. The whole earth was bursting and rending through the wooden supports of the passage. It seemed as if everything was going.

As he ran, he realised in a flash that there was one turning in the gallery—a corner where a support was wanting. What if——

He redoubled his efforts. His light was out, but he knew every inch of the passage, and he rushed on desperately.

Suddenly he felt his feet no longer tramping on the hard flooring, but on soft earth. He scrambled forward among it, but at every step it rose higher, and at last his hands touched the roof of the passage. He pushed them in front, and there was no way through—nothing but earth. He pushed desperately, tearing the earth with his fingers, but the earth only trickled about at his touch. The walled obstacle remained.

He was alone—entombed in utter darkness, and there was no way out.

He took from his pocket an electric torch which his officer had once given him, but it refused to give light when most wanted.

When the light did not act, he fingered the torch spring with quick nervousness, but the light would not come.

At last he gave it up. For a few moments he sat in silent despair, then he sprang up madly and commenced to shout and yell.

He faced the direction of the entrance, opened his mouth wide with his hands about it in trumpet fashion, and bawled with the fury of utter desperation.

The earth gave no answer.

At the end of a minute he stopped. His breath was coming and going in gulps. He already felt as if the

hot confined air were ceasing to give life, and he was slowly suffocating to death.

As the thought took hold of him, the "mole" fell on his face among the loose earth and half buried himself. He writhed and wriggled among it as if trying to tear the secret of freedom from its bosom. In his soul he was crying out—"Oh Earth, who have always befriended me, have pity now!"

He lay and waited.

But the earth gave no answer.

For Private Soulder it seemed to hold but the inexorable truth—dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return.

The great war—his part in it—the bursting of shells,—all these things were nothing to Private Soulder. He had no philosophy to sustain him; he only saw the staring fact of slow and terrible death.

After a time he commenced to go backwards to the place where he had been working, but the way was blocked. He found he was in a cage only about thirty feet long.

He returned to the loose earth and sat down in utter despair.

Up above, the tunnelling sergeant was calling the roll of men who had been working on the right section.

Every man was present except Soulder, and it appeared to the sergeant that it was his immediate job to extricate the "mole" if at all possible.

He organised the relief party. Before he went off, he ascertained, as far as he could do so, that nothing further appeared likely to happen.

Then they went down.

Connolly led the way, and they commenced to tunnel furiously through the loose earth that had fallen.

Connolly thought it could not be far, but the sergeant

knew that his ideas on the subject were not likely to be of much value. He had arrived at the mine mouth in a very scared condition.

Fortunately the distance was not too great, and the earth was loose, which made the digging easy, but contrariwise the earth kept falling in from above, which made the task both difficult and dangerous.

Six hours after they had started, they were still digging. It was then that a familiar sound reached the ear of the "mole" as he lay among the earth listening like a dog on guard for that very sound.

Hour by hour he had waited for it.

"Would they come—would they try—would they leave him to die—was it utterly impossible?" Terrible questions asked through terrible hours during which the "mole" had ceased to be black. When he came up to the air an hour later, his dark hair had turned to grey, and his eyes had grown to wear a haunted look.

At the sound of the spade Soulder sprang up and commenced to shout again furiously.

The rescuers heard him, and shortly after the earth let him go. Yet he was never the same again, because the earth had filled his soul with dread.

He had tasted once of the horrors of the death-wrestler's grip in a ghastly shape, and he longed ever after for air and sunshine. Nevertheless he retained the name of "mole" until he quitted the tunnelling company. When he went, the sergeant said that he was a good man at the job until the 15th —, but he'd always had the wind up since then. Kept running up to the top for no reason whatever. "Scared he was."

The officer said "Poor devil."

"He's gone to the flying corps," said the sergeant.

The officer laughed. "Wants room to breathe, I suppose."

"Oh, merely the equipment depot, or something of that kind."

The officer nodded absently, "We're a wonderful army," he muttered. "Oxford dons become engineer inspectors, tunnellers become flying men, and all blithering idiots get cushy jobs; then, of course, the people at home are surprised that we're not at Berlin yet."

A report reached General Drakelin that the —— mine had been shattered in part by a counter-mine. He was also informed that no casualties had resulted. The matter did not concern him very greatly, because that particular item was only a minor operation, and in any event it would go on.

He did not even become aware of the fact that Private Soulder had gone through the most terrible experience of his life, had changed from black to grey, and was possibly destined to rise from mole-ish pursuits to fly on wings as the eagle.

And yet to Private Soulder these events were positively epoch-making.

CHAPTER VI.

CONSIDERABLE ACTIVITY.

ABOUT these times there began to exist that state of things commonly referred to as "considerable activity." With the activity there also came into existence that impermeable something known as "atmosphere." Officers in the line realised that the peacefulness of winter was gone. The possibilities of raids had become greater, and there was a feeling in the air that something was going to happen.

Rumour rushed into the breach and supplied the daily information. "Have you heard the latest?"

"No, what is it?"

"We're going to take over from the French south of —."

"Really."

"Yes, I met —. He's on the staff, and he always has the latest."

"Oh. Then we're in for a busy time."

"Looks like it." This rather gloomily.

The staff information being apparently inaccurate or intentionally misleading, the following day sees a new version.

"Just seen Tolby up from the army school."

"Really. It's an age since I saw old Tolby last."

"Yes. He's looking fit as a fiddle. Says all the talk

down there is that we're to do a stunt up Nieuport way. We'll be clearing out of here in a week or two."

"Thought the Belgians were up there."

"Well, we'll have to take over or something. But anyhow, it's there we're going."

"Um. Well, I don't fancy the job. Seen enough of Flanders mud for my lifetime."

The informant smiles.

"Cheer up, old thing. You can only drown once."

So on the story grows and swells, until whole armies are moved about by anticipation from one mud centre to another, and have performed innumerable stunts in impossible places. Where they all come from, these stories, is a puzzle, but anyhow still they come. Monitors, flat-bottomed boats, barges, tanks, land warships, the like of which man hath not beheld, all these and multitudes of other devices are mooted, not excluding that new gas calculated to asphyxiate men by the thousand, merely through pressing a button—that marvellous invention often heard of, but fortunately perhaps not yet existing in fact. Still it has its chances as a rumour.

Where strong rumour is, however, one thing is generally true, and that is that something is going to happen, and the something is frequently heralded by the preparatory stunts.

It was during this state of atmosphere and preparatory stunts that 2nd Lieut. B. K. Murphy of the 10th Donegals came into notice, as well as Corporal Flanagan.

Lieutenant Murphy's accent gave little sign of the country of his origin, excepting through an occasional expression. Perhaps the most typical was the one in which he referred to the completion of anything. "I was just afther doing it, sir."

That was his favourite type of phrase for explaining

any little lateness or oversight on his part, to an unbelieving Irish colonel, whose ideas of discipline were comprehended in a remark which he occasionally used regarding unsatisfactory soldiers—"Tayke them away, sergeant-major, and drill them to death!"

Under the inspiring influence of the colonel, Lieutenant Murphy was induced to contemplate the possibility of a raid on the enemy lines. In simpler language, as expressed by a fellow-subaltern, the colonel "put the wind up, Murphy, darling."

After the colonel had described Murphy as an "idle spalpeen," a thing which the victim realised was true, and expressed a number of other home-truths in a forcible manner, Lieutenant Murphy began to sit up and take notice; indeed he began to realise that there was a war on. As he usually slept as much as possible in his dug-out, the fact had perhaps escaped his notice. The colonel also mentioned that, and, generally speaking, left "poor old Murphy feeling pretty limp."

The colonel, when he called at the dug-out, had found Murphy lying peacefully extended at full length on a straw bed. Murphy had opened his dreamy eyes feebly as the colonel entered. On realising the situation, Murphy had got up with creditable haste, that particular hour of the day not being exactly his hour for repose according to the daily programme of occupation.

Perhaps these circumstances had tended to annoy the colonel. However, he never suggested that Murphy was lacking in courage. Sloth was his crime.

After the colonel had gone, Murphy moved out of the dug-out to confer with brothers in misery. "Och, sure, they can never leave us alone, not even in a peaceful bit of the line like this," he wailed, "and the colonel gave me the devil's own telling off for nothing at all.

. . . And I said to him that with the excessive strain put on the platoon commanders in this kind of war, one had to get as much rest as they could."

At this point his brother-in-arms grinned.

"And what d'you think he said?"

The other waited appreciatively.

"He said, 'Murphy, if you make any more of these — excuses, you'll find yourself standing before a court-martial before you know where you are.' . . . Oh, he was d——d unpleasant, and the result of it all is, just as we were having a quiet time, I've got to go out patrolling in the mud and endanger me valuable life, all to catch a ruddy Boche."

"You've got to get a prisoner?"

"That's it. Information and identification. Said he didn't care a d—— how I got him, but if I didn't hook in a prisoner in three days' time, I'd be for it."

"He's only putting the wind up you."

"Maybe. But there'll be more than wind up if I don't get that prisoner."

"Ah, well, ye always were a lazy divil anyhow, Murphy."

"Sure, an' I'm not lazier than you."

"Every time, old bird."

"Och, well, it's no matter. Perhaps I am lazy, but how the divil am I to get the prisoner? From the way the colonel talked, one would think I'd only got to go across and shout, 'Prisoners wanted! Kameradski! Come across!'"

"Did he mention Marie house?"

"No."

"Well, it's quite easy. You've only got to stalk them for a night or two, learn their habits, and then shoot over one night with twenty or thirty men, and lie in wait. When the Boche crowd appear, slip it

across them, and bring one back by the scruff of the neck."

Murphy's face perceptibly brightened. "That's an idea," he said. "Sounds feasible."

"Absolutely," said the other. "It's a Military Cross given away."

"Um," said Murphy dubiously. "Not just so cushy as all that."

However, the idea bore fruit. Murphy mused over it for some time, and the same night went on patrol with Corporal Flanagan and some others.

They saw nine Boche enter Marie house on patrol at 11 P.M.—nine ghostly figures stealthily creeping along a trench about two feet deep, which led into this watch-house, which was situate on ground in No Man's Land, left empty during the day. At the same time he ascertained that the house was protected by wire.

On the following night, Murphy and party arrived at 9 P.M., it being then quite dark, and by the judicious use of wire-cutters, effected an opening in the barbed wire around the house, which he trusted would not be seen by the Boche. Having completed that, he again watched the arrival of the ten—they proved to be one more the second night—and remained for hours in a hole watching until the Boche departed for home about 5 A.M.

During these hours of waiting Lieutenant Murphy was almost frozen with cold, and internally cursed the fate that sent him there. Also he cursed the colonel, but not with malice or hatred. With the other end of his nature, Murphy knew that the colonel was a good and efficient soldier, and as an Irishman he respected the colonel for compelling him to do what, on account of his laziness, he did not want to do. That recognition

did not in the least prevent him from saying about 4 A.M., when the morning was at its coldest, "Curse him for a —— savage ould tiger!" The forcible epithet omitted can be readily supplied by every soldier who has seen active service, and known what it is like to lie motionless and frozen with cold, ever sinking deeper in the clammy mud.

At 4 P.M. on the following afternoon, Lieutenant Murphy stood in an open space behind a wood completing the rehearsal of the drama, making final inquiries, and giving the last instructions.

"Now, has every man got his hand-bomb?"

"Yis, sorr."

"And fifty rounds of ammunition?"

"Yis, sorr."

"And every man knows his place?"

"Yis, sorr."

"And the rifle bombers have got six rifle grenades each."

"Yis, sorr."

"All right, corporal, we'll march back to the trench, but just let me say for the last time" (he turned to the men), "and don't let there be anny misunderstanding. We've got to take a prisoner, so whatever you do, if it comes to a scrap, keep one alive. And, as I've said before, I think the easiest way'll be not to shoot the first man. If you don't fire at him, then there won't be anybody shooting at him, and we'll probably get him alive. But some o' you divils in your excitement'll fire at the first man you see . . . so I've warned ye, and ye're not to do it. Hit him on the head, or jump on his neck and throttle him, or do what you like to bring him in, but don't shoot. . . . Understand?"

"Yis, sorr."

Twenty-six intelligent privates had intimated comprehension. Some of them wondered a little privately why one Hun should thus be brought in alive. It seemed rather a waste of trouble. However, an order was an order, and if a specimen was wanted as a freak for exhibition at the Ballytiddledy fair, what was that to them.

Corporal Flanagan, however, fully understood the requirement, and subsequently explained the matter to the men in his own homely language. He completed his explanation by a little advice as to the treatment of prisoners "Some of you men are new to this job, so I'll just say a word of advice. None of you'll be afther sticking your bayonets into the prisoner unless he attimpts to run away. So ye'll understand and not be doing what you ought not to be doing. As a prisoner, he's entitled to be kept alive according to the laws of war, even if he is a Hun, but at the same time ye'll stand no nonsense, if he attimpts to run away." Corporal Flanagan's advice left no doubts in the minds of the raiders as to their duty should the prisoner attempt to run away.

At nine P.M. it was not very dark, but Murphy decided to risk it, and the party filed forth under his leadership.

They approached the wire stealthily and lay down as ordered. Murphy crept forward himself and opened up the wire where it had been cut. When he had finished, the corporal gave the signal to advance, and the men filed forward.

Six rifle grenadiers disposed themselves along the British side of the wire. They adjusted six grenades, one on each rifle. Cartridges had already been inserted in the rifle chambers to avoid the noise of bolts. Every man pushed the safety-catch of his rifle forward quietly

and waited. It was their duty to fire the barrage of bombs that was to cover the retirement of the others, or assist in the event of trouble by driving back any enemy advancing. As there was a gap of about four hundred yards from Marie house to the enemy's line, the grenadiers had a reasonable opening for their fire.

The remaining twenty men went with Murphy and the corporal, and filed slowly through the wire. As they did so, Murphy could almost hear his heart beating. The noise made by the men seemed to him to be dreadful, and he dared not speak to check it. Corporal Flanagan showed the entrance to the wire passage and whispered directions. "Mind the thrip wire! It's not cut. Lift your feet up and don't fall over it."

Murphy heard the words repeated again and again in Flanagan's awful whisper, and it seemed as if they would never get through and finish.

But they did, and lay down as rehearsed. After they had lain down, and their eyes grew more accustomed to the surroundings, men shifted a little to better their positions. One or two found that in the darkness they were preparing to shoot each other in the back. Every move they made was intensified in Murphy's hearing, and he ventured to whisper along, "For God's sake, keep still!"

He did not repeat the attempt to send a whispered message. The result was too terrible. In rich brogue he could hear it passing. "From Misther Murphy, and he says, for Gaad's sake and will ye keep still."

Murphy wished he had never sent the message, and waited, wondering if it were possible that the Hun could have failed to hear their advance. If the Hun patrol had started, surely they were bound to have heard.

He glanced at his luminous watch—nearly ten o'clock. There was an hour to wait. If they kept absolute silence, perhaps——

As the minutes went by with desperate slowness—they seemed hours—he felt tense. His ears were attuned for the least sound. He hoped fervently that his own look-out men against attack from rear or flank were doing their job. If not, they might all be scuppered. It would be no easy task to retire through that narrow opening in the wire, if they had to go back fighting. The thought worried him, but again he solaced himself with the reflection that the six grenadiers were thoroughly good men. They could be trusted to put up a stiff fight from the other side of the wire.

As occasional Very lights went up he peered around. At ten minutes to eleven he managed to look ahead as a light went up, and saw a sight that almost raised his hair. One of his men was in position right in view of the two-foot trench along which the enemy must come. If a light should go up as the enemy came along——

Even if a light didn't go up——

As the 10.50 Very light died out he felt utterly undone. That one man would likely enough wreck the whole show.

Was it too late to alter? Could he send along word? Should they chance it? A dozen questions occurred to him, which he seemed unable to solve. If they were coming, they must be near now. He decided to let things take their course.

He was so absorbed in thought that he actually missed the first sound of their coming, and the first intimation that he got was the agreed-on signal. He was touched by the next man. He passed on the signal and waited. He could see the men next him with their

rifles in their shoulder lying ready to shoot. The range was only fifteen yards, and the enemy on the previous nights had come along the trench quite openly, fully half of every man showing above the top.

He lay with his ear trained to the ground and his eyes staring in the direction of the trench. His revolver was in his hand ready for instant use.

The wait was almost unendurable. He felt a desire to leap up and rush, but restrained it.

They waited—and waited.

At last it came.

The Hun patrol advanced slowly, but the sound of men tramping through mud became quite clear, accompanied by the slow heavy movements of men equipped advancing through a rather narrow muddy trench.

The first man came in view. He could be seen quite well from the place where they lay. He came blundering on without any special care. The patrol had come that way often, and had never been interfered with. Even the careful Hun had grown careless.

The second and the third appeared; then there was an interval. Only a few yards separated the third from the fourth, and the remainder followed closely.

Murphy allowed the leading man to come abreast of the point where Corporal Flanagan and two men lay.

Then he coughed.

On the instant fifteen rifles flashed, and Corporal Flanagan and his two men leapt from cover. The corporal dashed at the leading man, and sprang upon him, bearing him to the earth by the fury of the unexpected attack. One man attended to the Hun immediately in rear, and no other man of the patrol was left unhit. In a second the prisoner's weapons

were taken from him, he making no attempt to resist. He appeared to be too startled or terrified to do anything.

The whole thing had taken little more than a minute. Nine Huns lay dead or dying, and one was a prisoner. The dead were being searched for papers. The prisoner was led off at once by the men detailed.

While some men were searching, others were already retiring through the gap in the wire.

Just as the withdrawal commenced, lights went up from the Hun line, and rifles started to crackle. But obviously they were hesitating to shoot because their own men were on patrol.

Murphy had counted on that for escape, and he was assisted to the extent that every man got through the wire in safety.

That, however, took considerable time, and meantime guns had got into action.

Once through the wire, every man had orders to get back as fast as possible.

Murphy came through last. As he did, one of his men swayed in front and fell.

Rifle bullets were whizzing past, but he himself was unhit.

Murphy shouted to the grenadiers—"Two of you carry him in. Rest fall back."

Two of the grenadiers lifted the wounded man and started to carry. They struggled on to a hole and lay down with the man there. Murphy lay with them.

Flares were going up every minute, and a bomb crashed near them, while bullets were whizzing continually.

The position was unpleasant, but the main body were sufficiently far off to be fairly safe, as the ground afforded cover in places. There only remained the wounded man, the two grenadiers, and the leader.

Murphy felt that they must go, and gave the order to move the moment the flares died out.

The wounded man was unable to walk.

Murphy took the rifles from both the grenadiers and carried them, while the grenadiers gave their whole strength to carrying the man.

At last the lights subsided for a few moments. The party staggered back twenty yards and lay down.

Murphy set his teeth—two hundred yards to go, and another hail of shot flying. They had almost certainly been spotted before lying down again.

Up again two minutes later, and another staggering rush.

The wounded man groaned as they laid him down. As they lay he raised his head and whispered, "Misther Murphy! Misther Murphy!"

"What is it?"

"Don't be afther troublin' no more. . . . Any place is the same to me. . . . Just tell the ould woman, and the death won't——"

The wounded man swooned.

"Divil a die for you, Pat M'Gee," said Murphy.

"Come on!" he shouted to the grenadiers whenever the lights were down. They were reaching a more concealed part of the ground.

At the next halt Corporal Flanagan and four men arrived to assist. The whole of the main party and the prisoner had got back in safety.

Retiring from hole to hole and cover to cover, it took nearly an hour for the party to cross the 200 yards, but they all got home. The wounded man was expected by the doctor to recover.

Lieutenant Murphy reported to the colonel as he had been ordered to do.

The colonel shook his hand warmly.

"Good work, Murphy! Good work! I knew you were the man for the job if you put your heart into it."

"Thanks, sir," said Murphy. He looked rather pale.

"Have a whisky?" said the colonel.

"Thanks very much, sir."

The colonel got the details from him, and the raid was duly reported in 'Comic Cuts,' otherwise the official daily war summary issued to the troops.

When the prisoner arrived at the headquarters of the Donegals his face was white and his eyes were wide open with terror. The wretched boy was only seventeen, and literally frightened out of his wits.

On being examined by a staff officer, the boy stated his name and regiment. He did not know the Division to which he belonged, or said he did not; but that mattered little, because the regiment was included in the Ersatz Division which appeared from the papers in General Drakelin's hands to hold that part of the line.

The identification was satisfactory, but little other information was to be had, because the boy was too ignorant of the general military situation.

Papers taken from the Huns who had been killed included a letter addressed to an N.C.O. apparently from his wife. A quotation from the letter was also published in the summary. It ran: "Meat is getting scarcer and scarcer every day, and is terribly dear. We cannot afford to buy any now, and I do not know what is to become of us and the children if this war lasts much longer. There were riots here about food last week, and some of the shops were rushed, but that has done no good, only wasted some of the food in the struggle, and several were killed and wounded."

"But I do not know what to say. Perhaps I have said too much and may get us into trouble. Only I know not what to do, and I must tell you somehow, because we have no one else to turn to. Send us help, or come to us somehow."

The N.C.O. to whom the letter was addressed was lying dead in the trench.

CHAPTER VII.

MAISIE AND OTHERS.

ON the 18th of — a medley of things happened, all utterly disconnected so far as the immediate purpose and act was concerned, but in the minds of the staff forming each a link in the great chain of preparation that was rolling forward day by day.

At Rennel station, so called, but in fact nothing but a wooden platform with corrugated-iron covering painted by the camouflage artists, various groups of men hung around waiting. One group, obviously composed of men going on leave, were ranged in a side corner seated upon some logs, and were chorusing softly, to the tune of "Three Blind Mice," the leave ballad—

" Three days' leave,
 Three days' leave,
 The first was lost up at G.H.Q.,
 The second—oh well, there was D.H.Q.,
 The third—for the men, it would never do,
 Oh, three days' leave."

The song was being sung placidly, without rancour, and obviously did not apply to them.

Near the entrance to the station two ambulance cars stood waiting. The drivers lounged around smoking and talking casually. They were waiting the arrival of the twelve o'clock train.

A few officers and men returning by the same train also hung about.

"What are the cars for?" one of the officers queried.

"We're meetin' the train, sir, to take up the nurses to the new casualty clearing station."

"Oh. Are they bringing them up as far as that?" The tone of voice expressed surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"By Jove, there must be something in the wind."

"Looks like it, sir."

The officer moved off to talk to his companions. "Hear that, old bird. They're bringing the nurses up to the new C.C.S."

"Gadsookers! Going to be trouble, what?"

"Yes. . . . I'm willing to lay anybody 3 to 1 that there's hell to pay in this quarter within three months' time." The officer gazed around, but there were no takers.

"Say, old thing, we must have a healthy glare at the nurses when they come in. I haven't seen a pretty girl for an age." He meditated. "The present rigorous exclusion of the eternal feminine from the war area is decidedly——"

"Tame?"

He assented dubiously.

"Yes. At least it tends to produce dulness."

"Quite agree, me lad. It does. But what would you? We cannot have them bathed in gore."

"Um. Well, the ancient Greeks and Trojans had their Helens, and——"

"Yes, but they conducted war on gentlemanly lines. They were too gentlemanly even to burn their enemies' ships by fire torpedo, and in our day that would be regarded as an ordinary and polite method of fighting."

"True. But——"

"No use arguing, old dear. You know your ideas are impracticable. And here they come anyhow, so get ready to burst forward and embrace them or carry their vanity bags, or otherwise do the gentle paladin act, reciting these lines—

'Welcome, sweet harbingers of love——'

"Shut up, you fool!"

The reciter grumbled. "Very crude!" he said. "Oh, very. Just as I was getting up poetic fervour."

The other speaker paid no further attention, but had suddenly become animated. Some of the nurses were looking out of the train, and one face had attracted his attention.

"'Pon my soul! If that isn't Maisie Herbert! Knew she had taken to V.A.D.ing on an active scale, but never expected she'd get this length."

"Ah. Aa—aa—ah!" said No. 1 amusedly.

No. 2 was annoyed. "Ass!" he said with vigour.

When the train stopped, he burst forward in the direction of the dark-haired V.A.D. at whom he had been gazing. She was a tall graceful girl, and quite the beauty of the group. But No. 2's reception was not all that he could have desired. She, indeed, shook hands pleasantly and smiled, but a few yards away from Maisie and the irrepressible lieutenant stood the matron, clad in the uniform of St John of Jerusalem, and she—— Ah, she was an army matron with the eye of a scientist and a frame of flexible steel. She was wonderful and amazingly efficient, but free from all emotional weakness, and quite indifferent to man except for the purpose of curing his ailments and renewing him for battle.

Efficiency wonderful. Philandering not included.

As Maisie went away, she indicated the nature of the situation. "The matron's a good sort," she said; "but she's a trifle touchy, and doesn't understand friendliness with men!"

"Oh, d—n the matron!" said the lieutenant. "Can one not speak to an old friend one hasn't seen for years?"

"Well, you have spoken," said Maisie, "and it's quite all right. But—there's a war on," she said, finding it useless to explain further.

"D—n the war," said that explosive lieutenant. After months of isolation, the war positively prevented him from speaking to a pretty girl when she became available. It was monstrous.

Maisie took her place in the car. She smiled pleasantly to the lieutenant, and there was a gleam of humour in her eye.

The lieutenant was left on the platform, using, I regret to say, forcible language.

The cars wound rapidly up the roadway and disappeared behind a wood. About half an hour later a dozen nurses were unpacking their kits in new tents, and generally setting up house.

In a few minutes' time they were doing up their back hair, and wrestling with the problem of the hot-water supply, also with the question of a cup of tea.

The matron with the flexible steel frame found that efficiency demanded hair treatment as much from her as any one else.

And yet there was no one to see all the effort employed in those details which undoubtedly tend to produce feminine charm.

Curious. The line of distinction between vanity, neatness, and efficiency is difficult to draw. Maisie Herbert was almost beautiful. The matron was quite

plain—though, in her severe way, kindly. But they both found time to attend to those feminine details, and any one who had seen them sitting a little later at tea would have said that both in their own particular style had devoted care and skill to the work.

They drank tea out of enamel tin mugs, and made themselves toast from the ration bread.

Along with the ambulance cars there also waited at Rennel station a considerable column of horse-transport and motor-lorries, with two teams of artillery horses.

After the passengers had alighted, the train, which was very long, was shunted forward to enable another train to come in.

An army of labour men appeared from different departments and commenced to unload this train.

With much heaving and pushing a couple of field-guns were got out on the roadway. The teams were harnessed up, and they trotted off to their destination.

After prolonged manœuvre in a narrow space, one of the motor-lorries was backed against the siding, and men proceeded to unload 18-pounder shells and load them on the lorry. Dangerous things when bursting, but the men handled them with indifference, whether they knew much about them or not. They had been handling these things for days. Half the trains that came up brought shells—18-pdr., 5·9, 8-inch; it was all one to these labourers, except that some shells were more difficult to handle than others.

When the lorry-load was completed, the lorry rolled off with its burden, moving slowly. The lorry bumped and clattered along until it came to No. 14 Ammunition Dump, three miles away, when unloading went on again, and the shells were set in rows and covered with tarpaulin. There they were to rest until the artillery

called for them. A solitary sentinel watched over them night and day, and beside his sentry-post was a notice, "No Smoking Allowed."

Ammunition dumps had become plentiful around these roads. They were not conspicuous; indeed, the people who had made them seemed to prefer inconspicuous places; but although their appearance was not great, the potential power of each of the stores was literally enormous. Millions of pounds sterling were stored up there by the roadside in shells that would all be blown into air in a few days' time.

Queer to think of. Millions of pounds being deliberately exploded into air. Value almost utterly lost. For which sort of reason a man called Angell thought no one would ever be so mad as to make war; but he was wrong. And shells are not the only item.

If Scotsmen were as niggardly in their ideas as jocular criticism would have it, it is difficult to understand *their* success as warriors, for the cash argument is terrible. The Scotsman enjoying the pleasures of London is reputed to have cried in horror, "Bang goes saxpence!" But every time Jock hurls a Mills bomb, he might exclaim with far more mournful insistence, "Bang goes six and eightpence!"

General Drakelin had nothing to do with that. His business was to win battles, as cheaply as possible, of course, but anyhow to win them.

Rennel station in these days always seemed to have a line of waggons standing lined up before its platform. Sometimes waggons waited for hours, the patient horses gazing about them idly, or munching in their nose-bags.

Many of them came daily from various directions to meet the supply.

Transport officers, transport sergeants, drivers, and all

manner of men gathered there, as it happened to be their turn to do so.

And the scene was always the same scene of activity, loading and unloading day after day.

Somebody somewhere had indented (that is, had filled up a form called A. F. 999862, representing a request) for certain things. Somebody farther back received that form, and either supplied the goods or sent the form on, if he did not possess them himself, to the place where they could be had.

In that way A. F. 999862, or its brother A. F. 999863, might roam all over France, or even penetrate England, and the effect of its importunacy might be felt in New Zealand, six thousand or more miles away. Perhaps somebody discovered somewhere that form A. F. 999864 should have been used, or that the indent &c.63 had been misconstrued, and sent same back with a reference to A. C. 15,000,000. That kind of thing creates delay and waste of temper.

But despite temporary delays, argumentative staff captains, troublesome blighters at the base, and many other troubles, New Zealand mutton was unladed from the supply-train, and Fray Bentos in its bully tins poured up in constant streams along with bread and cheese and salt and tea, and all the other stomachic provision of a great army.

To stand watching the scene was a sight in itself. To see the mules from South America, and drivers from the ends of the earth, the dusty waggons, the horses from Ireland, Canada, the Argentine, and a hundred other places, the strange mingling of men from all units, all intent on the same purpose, the rapid loading and unloading of beeves and loaves and bully tins and sides of beef—to think that the same loading and unloading was going on perhaps at the

very same hour down at the base, at the harbours of France and England, at the harbours of Australia and Canada and South Africa—that the rice of six months ahead was only starting at that moment from the harbours of India—to see and realise that all that world-wide organisation was rolling on from day to day, all in order that General Drakelin's army might be fed, that it might have those rations up two days ahead of the days of eating,—does it not stir the imagination?

In the tilled fields of the quiet villages of England, in the timber forests of Scotland, on the sheep farms of Australia, on the ranches and tillage of the world, the war was being waged, the wealth of three-fourths of the globe pouring forwards for the nations that hold the seas.

Even the greatness of General Drakelin's concentration was as nothing to the immensity of the world concentration which lay behind his effort.

All of which was happening because Napoleon's dictum is still true, that an army marches on its stomach.

To reach those stomachs in the front line, ahead of Rennel station, there were the waggons, then the men tramping wearily through mud and forming the ultimate link of the world-wide chain that left the tea steaming hot in the dixies of the cooks in the front line, or warmed a scrap of bacon on the lid of a mess-tin over a humble Tommy's cooker.

At the hour when the rations were going up to the trenches about the centre point of the line which General Drakelin had under survey, it was quite dark, and a man lay in a shell-hole about eighty yards from the British line.

At the same moment a corporal and three men were

making their nightly patrol of the line. They moved each man a little apart from the other. Their movements were quiet.

When the corporal in charge was about ten yards from the shell-hole he heard a hiss. Every man of the patrol got down immediately and waited in tense readiness, gazing around with fierce intensity.

For a few seconds they heard nothing. Then the hiss was repeated.

After the hiss there was a pause, then a voice called in a loud whisper, "Don't shoot!"

The corporal had no intention of shooting. It was mighty dangerous to do so at that part of the line. The Boche was only about a hundred yards away, and an incautious shot, at the best, meant lying "doggo" in the mud for a considerable time. But the corporal had doubts. He had a strong suspicion that it was some new Hun trick. He glanced all around him, but could make out nothing.

The voice spoke again. "I'm an English officer. I want to get back."

The corporal had fearful doubts of the whole thing, but something had to be done.

"How many?" he called in a low voice.

"Only one."

The corporal meditated. If one only advanced he could be killed anyhow, but he was exceedingly suspicious.

"Who are you?"

"An officer of the — Fusiliers."

The corporal had never heard of the — Fusiliers being in that part of the line.

The voice spoke again. "I've escaped from the enemy lines."

The corporal reflected inwardly. "It's a — lie.

You'll not do me with that story." But how was he to act? He spoke again.

"What's your name?"

"Captain Willingby."

The corporal glared into the darkness. The tones of the man sounded quite English.

Again the voice spoke. "For God's sake, help me in. I'm starving."

The corporal did not yet believe, but he acted. "Stand up and advance one," he ordered.

It was dangerous to stand up, but the stranger rose out of the hole. At the moment when he did so, a flare went up. The stranger went down, but not before the corporal had caught a glimpse of the uniform and head-gear, and it seemed to him that they were not British.

When the light had died out, he called out, "You're not in English uniform."

The voice answered, but this time the corporal had less doubt. "I know I'm not in English uniform, but I tell you I'm Captain Willingby of the — Fusiliers, and I'm starving. Surely you can get on with it and help me through. I'm only one man." The voice sounded wearily savage.

"Then advance one."

Captain Willingby advanced and was escorted to the British lines by the corporal.

Arrived at the headquarters of the battalion, Captain Willingby told the colonel that he had been in the German lines. He was on the Intelligence Staff, and had been in the enemy's camp for seven days. During the last three days he had had almost nothing to eat. He was dressed in the uniform of a German officer.

The colonel provided food for the officer while he had the story verified from Divisional Headquarters.

Captain Willingby's face had a sunken and hunted

look, but beyond explaining his errand, he said little about his actual doings. He ate hungrily, and remarked once that the Hun somehow got to know that there was spying going on, or thought so, and after that he had had rather a thin time.

A telephone message arrived that a car was waiting for Captain Willingby at X house, and he left immediately with a guide. Said he would rather get on till he reached a decent bed and bath than hog it in a dug-out. In the car on the way down he fell asleep, and some casual shell fire did not wake him.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE OF THE 180.

THE place was situate south-east of the part of the line at which the Intelligence Officer returned, and the trouble began on the following night. The murky dulness of the spring day was slowly merging into the deeper murk and gloom of the night. There was no sort of "gloaming" to mark the passing of the day, no pleasing change of sky, no artistic effects, great or small, nothing but murk gradually deepening in its intensity. And everything was in character with the atmosphere. The sky above appeared as a blanket of leaden cloud, the earth below vied with the sky in mud of blacker hue, and the trenches with their battered sandbags and disordered orderliness (any one who has been out will understand the phrase representing the perpetual contest of discipline with the forces of nature and shell fire, combined to disintegrate) appeared to Captain Buckler as the fitting complement of everything else. He was in the midst of trench warfare, as he had been for some time past, and he defined it all in his own mind as the muddy and ruddy limit in human insanity.

As the night closed in, the men were "standing to" with fixed bayonets. They had done so every night of every relief for the past three months to Captain Buckler's knowledge, for the reason at least in part that

it might be that the Boche would seize that particular hour for a grand assault, but the Boche never did in Captain Buckler's experience.

For which reason, perhaps, the captain sighed wearily. He almost felt as if he would have welcomed the Boche coming across just then. It would have been a relief from the deadly monotony of relieving trenches and "standing to" and gazing out at an enemy unseen.

He raised his periscope and gazed into the mirror.

As usual, he saw nothing but the accustomed bit of country, with the dim outline of the Boche trenches, and the rubbish stream and crater-broken ground in front. Half-unconsciously and vaguely he noticed as he had noticed before the curious configuration of a part of the Hun lines, a little to the right of the point from which he gazed.

As the evening had grown considerably darker, he took down his periscope and ventured to look over the top of the parapet. Just for three seconds he gazed, then took his head down. He walked a little farther along the trenches, and again put his head above the parapet. There was nothing unusual to be seen.

He turned to the nearest man. "Pass the word along to stand down," he said.

"Pass the word along to stand down," echoed the man addressed.

Curious that literal obedience to orders. The message rolled along the trench from man to man in varying tones and accents. "Pass the word along to stand down." Not even the sergeants, when it reached them, varied it. They might have said, "Stand down!" But no. They too echoed the very words, and weary mud-bespattered men stood down and moved a little more freely in their bays, leaving the night sentries on guard.

Captain Buckler retired to his dug-out, and there,

perched on a three-and-a-half-legged chair of doubtful stability, dined. At the end of dinner he lingered lovingly over an enamel mug of tolerable coffee made from some patent concoction (*café au lait* in a tin), and sampled a cigar from a box which had just come out from home. During these proceedings he felt more reconciled to the miserable stodginess of trench warfare. In the candle-light dimness of a small-sized dug-out he watched the smoke from his cigar curl upwards, and mused a little. He also saw one of his subalterns smoking one of the cigars with obvious contentment, and that pleasing sight induced him to confide something of his musings.

"Wonder if we couldn't get up something to worry the Boche a bit," he said. "The general's always fussing around and jogging me to do something." He looked interrogatively at his subaltern.

"Um—m," said the subaltern, not too hopefully. In his first days of trench warfare the subaltern had been full of hopefulness and schemes, but as none of them had ever materialised, and the difficulties of trench warfare had become more apparent, the warmth of his first bright enthusiasm had been somewhat chilled. "Don't think this is a very good spot for that sort of thing," he submitted dubiously.

Perhaps Captain Buckler had grown more optimistic under the soothing influence of coffee and cigars. In trench warfare the value of such things is enhanced by contrast. "I'm not so sure," he said. "I'm not so sure," he repeated meditatively some time later.

The subaltern went out shortly after. Meeting another "sub," he confided to him. "Heard the latest?"

"No."

"You'd better get your insurance paid."

"Wha—at!"

"Yes. It's right this time. The old man's hatching an egg."

"Not really!"

"Absolute fact, I tell you."

Sub. No. 2 grinned. He had heard of these things before.

And possibly that egg would never have been hatched but for other things that happened.

With the drenching weather, deadly monotony, and all the other tiresome conditions, a measure of the lethargy of trench warfare had descended upon them all, and they needed something to stir them up.

That something came at half-past twelve midnight.

The left end of Captain Buckler's section of trench was "in the air." That is to say, the line was not continuous at that point, but broke off leaving a somewhat dangerous end sticking out towards the Boche lines.

At half-past twelve the night was very dark. Mr Ransom, who was on guard, was some distance away from the end of the line which jutted out. He had fired a Very light at 12.20. The flare had shone out well, but the fogginess of the night had made it difficult to see, and the light had revealed nothing. All other ordinary precautions had been taken and everything seemed in order.

Nevertheless, at 12.30 the storm burst.

Ransom was first alarmed by the dull thud of bombs and the whiteness of smoke arising, mingled with shouts. He immediately rushed along in the direction of the sounds.

He shouted to the sentries as he passed, "Wake every man!"

As he came nearer the scene of the trouble the men were already awake and firing. The bombers were

flinging bombs. He sent a man to report to Captain Buckler.

But it was all over before Captain Buckler arrived.

It was only a bombing attack and not pressed into the trench. Under cover of the fog the Huns had crawled to the gap in the line and flung their bombs. When they retired, they left one man dead behind them. But they had accomplished something, for there were two men killed and four wounded in the British trenches.

When Captain Buckler knew the full results of the Hun visit, the placidity induced by after-dinner cigars vanished away to give place to bitter resentment.

He remained at the point of danger for some time until the wounded had been removed. From time to time he muttered while he waited and stared out over the parapet. As he did so he used some strong language: "I'm —— if I'll stand this!"

He was particularly angry because Private Crane, one of the best of the bombers, was killed.

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As often happens, the action resulting from the loss of these men was in part undertaken to avenge them, but in part also as an answer to the urgent calls made from headquarters for offensive action. It was a case of killing two birds with one stone, but it is possible that without the enemy attack the raid might never have occurred.

Captain Buckler was an excellent officer, steady, reliable, and satisfactory to look upon, though somewhat too large in bulk for trench warfare. He was trusted by his superiors, and with reason, but he had one failing put quite succinctly by the colonel on a memorable occasion, when he remarked that Buckler was an excellent fellow, but rather too lethargic ever to do anything out of the way.

The observation was just for ordinary times, but if something occurred really to awake the sleeper—what then?

Subs. Nos. 1 and 2 discussed the matter casually on their rounds in the trenches next morning.

“D’you remember what I said yesterday?” queried No. 1.

“About the old man?”

“Yes.”

“Rather funny I should mention it. He’s often said things like that before, but this time, I do believe, something ’ll happen.”

“I wouldn’t be over-excited about it,” said No. 2 with gentle irony.

“I don’t know.” No. 1 shook his head reflectively. “He’s mighty angry about last night, I can tell you. He’s hardly spoken a word, and he’s been gazing at the map ever since.”

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At the very moment when the subs. were talking Captain Buckler was gazing at the map with knitted brows. From time to time he made measurements of little spaces on the map.

After a time he desisted from that occupation and wrote a short report of the previous night’s occurrence. But with that completed, he returned to his task of examining the map, with its squares and red lines and dots and circles.

His examination of the map apparently afforded him little satisfaction. “Haven’t got enough information,” he muttered. Nevertheless, he appeared to have a definite idea of some sort, for his eyes were fixed intently on one spot of the enemy lines. He had never studied his map of the country and approximate line of the enemy trenches so carefully before, and the more he

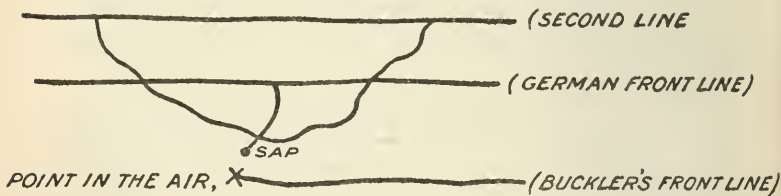
looked at the map the more a conviction began to grow in him that there was a place where the enemy might be vulnerable.

But more information must be had.

There are people at home who think when they see it reported that "a successful raid took place on the enemy trenches last night," that the whole thing is done on the spur of the moment by a selection of dare-devils led by the youngest subaltern out for glory. Let it be said at once that no idea is more mistaken. Almost every successful raid of importance is prepared for weeks beforehand, is worked out to the last detail, and is rehearsed like a stage-play till each man knows his work blindfold.

From the hour when he decided that more information must be had, Captain Buckler bent his mind and body to the task of preparing.

The map at which he had been gazing displayed the German trenches thus:—



From his study of the map Buckler came to the simple conclusion that there was a part of the German trenches which jutted out from their main front line, and that that part terminated in a short saphead at the point nearest to the British line.

Nothing more than these very simple facts was to be discovered from the map. There was no information

about the enemy's barbed-wire defences, and beyond the general information from his own patrols that there were wire entanglements, he knew nothing else of value.

At the conclusion of his study of the map, he meditated. Eventually he murmured. "Nothing else for it," he said rather dolefully. The prospect of dragging his own bulky six-foot-two form on a tour of investigation through clammy mud on a bitterly cold night did not loom pleasantly before him. Of course he might have sent one of his subs., but it was to his credit that, having been roused, he did not seek to place the burden on other shoulders.

During the rest of the day he spent considerable time in examining the Hun trenches through his periscope, and with satisfaction he identified with reasonable certainty the saphead. He also noted with extreme care the nature of the ground and the situation of certain shell-craters near the sap.

When evening came he discussed the matter with Corporal Sangar, an experienced patrol hand who had been out on that ground frequently, and arranged to go out with him at one o'clock A.M. when the corporal adjudged the conditions of light and warfare would probably be most favourable.

All went well until the appointed hour, and the night light was then excellent, neither too utterly dark nor too brilliant. At one o'clock, therefore, Corporal Sangar led the way, crawling through the sally-port. Buckler squeezed slowly after him, and they emerged into "No Man's Land," passing through the opening in the entanglements which defended his own trenches.

At that moment any one who had known Buckler as the captain of lethargy would have marvelled at him.

He was no longer stolid, placid, and unmoved, but for a little while every faculty of him was awake. The corporal was inclined to assist him at the passing of the narrow sally, but he brushed aside assistance. His big form seemed to grow wonderfully agile and to wriggle itself through by sinuous movement. As they advanced across the ground, the corporal, a slim-built fellow, found that he was easily followed, while he noticed the captain's eyes, staring clear in the darkness, were glancing swiftly on every side.

Everything seemed to be in their favour. The night was just dark enough to enable them to see a few yards ahead without danger of being observed from any considerable distance, while there was a considerable frequency of intermittent noise from all quarters, which aided rather than hindered them. They lay still twice while flare-lights were burning, but otherwise they were quite untroubled.

Corporal Sangar led the way across the intervening yards to the shell-hole which Buckler had marked as their destination. He had calculated from the map that the hole was within fifteen yards of the end of the German saphead.

Arrived there, they lay down and waited.

Two minutes—three—four—how those minutes hang and seem tense on work like that. Lying in the side of the shell-hole, Captain Buckler's eyes looked upwards out of the hole—waiting—waiting—for that enemy who might appear. His ears too were straining to catch a sound of danger.

Nothing happened.

Slowly he raised his face, masked with a khaki cloth cover which left nothing visible but his eyes (holes left for ears): inch by inch he raised it till his eyes just

cleared the edge of the crater. Corporal Sangar followed his example.

Then they gazed.

Just as his eyes cleared the top of the crater Buckler's ears caught a sound—a low cough sounding a dozen yards or so to the right. He remained motionless except his eyes, which stared steadily around in the direction of the cough.

Still nothing happened. But Buckler's heart almost leaped with suppressed and excited delight while he stared at the ground and enemy works in front of him.

This is what he saw.

Right in front of him, about ten yards away, was the line, which after looking awhile he could clearly distinguish—the line of the German barbed-wire entanglements. But in that line there was quite clearly a gap of about two yards, and through that gap was a pathway leading to the point from which the cough had seemed to come. He had no doubt that that point, the sand-bagged outline of which he could see, was the head of the enemy's sap, and the cough told him that the sap-head was occupied.

A minute later he received confirmation of that surmise, for the sounds of a man talking in a low voice could be distinctly heard.

He waited a few minutes longer, listening, watching, noting the state of the wire in front, and so far as he could see, the number of crater-holes adjoining that in which they lay hid. He could make out at least two more, right and left of where they lay.

Having completed his survey, he slowly withdrew his head. Having done so, he signed to the corporal to retire.

They went back without being hindered. (Does any one wonder if the German sentries are really so careless or inefficient? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Such things have been done hundreds of times unscathed. The chances of the night are many. But such things have also been done many times at a full price.)

On returning, Buckler compared notes with the corporal.

In the morning he felt justified in reporting to his commanding officer for assistance and information, in view of the possibility of making a trench raid.

The colonel reported to the brigade, who entered whole-heartedly into the scheme and readily promised all assistance.

In short, Captain Buckler got a free hand—a glorious thing in war. It is the power of the initiative, however small the scale.

From the moment when he received authority the work of preparation began, and it lasted for three weeks.

It is not my business to say how the preparation took place, but effects felt and known to the enemy are the legitimate province of the writer in war-time.

As regards those effects, there were a number of curious, apparently unconnected, things which happened to the Hun in these days which must have surprised and perhaps pained him. They were out of the usual run of things, decidedly not business as usual, and yet so few, and in some ways inconspicuous, that they probably only aroused occasional suspicions in his breast, subsequently lulled by the fact that nothing particular seemed to happen.

Take the artillery, for instance. At some parts of the line within a mile or so of Captain Buckler's

trenches they seemed to have lost all sense of proportion, and to be loosing off shells in the most abrupt and ill-directed fashion. That could be the only conclusion at which the Hun could arrive. Shells would arrive in the most unusual spots, not many at a time, but say three or four, and then the shelling would stop in the most inconsequent way. Again, on other days, there would be quite a lively shelling for a short time over a considerable stretch of line, but dying away with casual suddenness.

What could any scientific Hun think? Just the stupid British pounding away as usual under the impression that, if they fired long enough, they would eventually hit something.

Whatever the Hun thought, there is no doubt that at the end of the three weeks the artillery observers had carefully registered all the points indicated by Captain Buckler; and the guns immediately behind could barrage whatever stretch of trench they were asked to "smother," while adjoining artillery had also found the particular destination for their shells likely to be most useful.

The trench mortars too were infected with the same sort of intermittent activity, and kept lobbing things across at odd times to the Hun. To do the Hun justice, he replied vigorously to these disturbances with "torpedoes" and other scientific abominations.

The action of the air service never attracted the attention of the Boche to the extent of getting his "wind up," but quite a few planes flew over the trenches opposite Buckler's line. The photographs of the German trenches which they took duly reached Captain Buckler, but the Hun did not know that.

These effects of the general activity which Captain

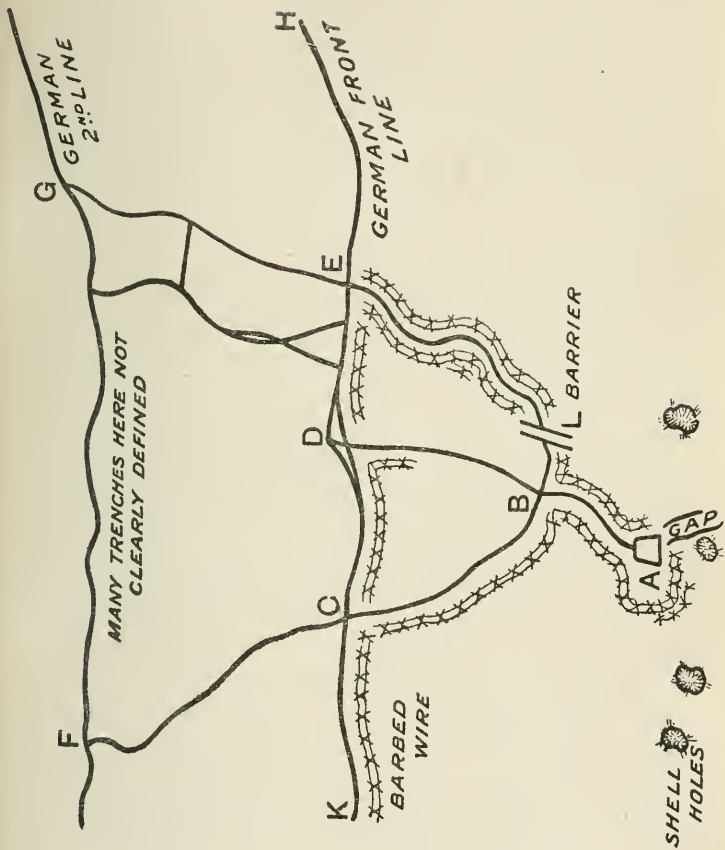
Buckler's intention to raid had created, were the only things which might have guided the Hun to suppose that trouble for him was in store, but he did not heed these warnings.

About the other work done by Captain Buckler, and the methods adopted by him to train the selected men, and the arduous work involved, the Hun could know nothing.

Nevertheless that work was done by the captain of lethargy, and it was done well.

To understand just what happened, another little map of the trenches as they appeared to Captain Buckler (all information received from aeroplane photographs and frequent night patrols having been added) may prove useful. An indication may also be given of the plan which he proposed to carry out, always remembering that there were certain things about the Huns opposite which he could not ascertain. In particular, he could not find out whether their trenches were held in force. All the information he had on that matter was the fact, which he had ascertained on his own patrol, that the saphead was occupied by those guttural-talking sentries. Other patrols had confirmed that information. When the attack was made it was therefore bound to be, as regards opposition, in literal truth a leap in the dark. Scores of Huns might spring from their funk-holes, or, on the other hand, there might be none.

The trench map stood thus on the eve of the raid (excepting of course the notes and lettering added here for convenience):—



The scheme to be carried out was simplicity itself as all good schemes are. The attackers were to go across in the dark, enter through the gap in the wire, kill the inhabitants of saphead A, move down the sap A B in two separate parties, move round the triangle B C D, kill or capture all Huns within that area, and then come "home" again as fast as possible. The rear of the parties going down B C and B D was to be secured by a patrol making a block or barrier with sandbags at L. While the attackers were doing all these things, or after they had done them, the artillery were to barrage, or in simpler term to "plaster" the whole of the German second line and the intervening trenches as near to the German first line as possible. They were also to batter the front line right and left of the attack, while the trench mortars were specially to hammer the parts D E and L E.

Originally Buckler had thought of attacking the whole jutting area, but the need for simplicity induced him to confine himself to the small triangular part, especially in view of the long winding nature of the trench B E, and also of the fact that there appeared to be so much additional trench communication behind D E.

Just to "cut out." That was all.

He calculated half an hour for the whole "strafe," then back in double-quick time under cover of the artillery fire and "racket," a cup of hot bovril to be waiting for every man on his return—the last a small mercy no doubt, but comforting and soothing to excited nerves.

On the night of the "strafe" the selected men were all ready. Mr Ransom and Mr Blantyre (commanders respectively of Nos. 2 and 3 parties of the attack) were

there, apparently in good if somewhat excited spirits. Corporal Sangar had the men for blocking ready, and was cool and grim as usual; and every man had all the necessary munitions in the shape of bombs, spades, wire-cutters, &c., distributed among them as seemed best. But of course the weather went wrong: it had suddenly broken down in the afternoon, with the result that the ground was sodden and flooded in parts.

When it ceased to rain about nine o'clock, Buckler was so relieved that he scarcely realised how much rain had fallen and how sodden the ground had become.

Anyhow, rain or no rain, there had been so much preparation and worry that, now that he had actually got everything in train and every person and gun arranged for, he was determined to go on and get the — thing done at all costs. (In small "strafes," as in big ones, the actors, at the end of the preparatory stages, are frequently desperate to get the thing over somehow or other. Men only get "stale" and officers irritable under excessive preparation, and cynical people grouse contemptuously, "Is the ruddy thing ever coming off?")

At one o'clock A.M. punctually the first man of Buckler's party (No. 1 party) crawled through the sally-port, followed by the remaining men of the party and Buckler. Ransom's party came second, Corporal Sangar and three men for the block came third, and lastly, Mr Blantyre and party to support.

Picture it for an instant—every man of them, officers included, laden each with the special impedimenta of his part of the night's work, but all indiscriminately carrying a share of bombs,—every one twisting himself and his burden of ironmongery and chemical explosive, not to mention his mental burden

of hope, excitement, strained nerve, and desperate intention—twisting the whole lot through that sally-port. What if the pin got out of one of these scores of bombs! What if something went wrong with any of the other “stinkers”? What if—oh, infinite possibilities, but these are just the chances of war.

Out of the sally-port picture them stealing across No Man’s Land—I should like to say as sleuth-hounds, panther-like, for the sake of effect, but truth compels me to remark that there is probably rather more resemblance to the elephant than the panther in the movements of a heavily-laden British private. Picture them, however, stealing, stomach-crawl, hands and knees, low-bent walk—in fact, any way and every way—across, to the best of their ability, to those crater-holes ordered as the first stage of their advance.

Hear the flop down in the mud and the sploosh it made when Private Murdo went down as a German flare went up; also the subdued gurgle in the throat of Private Gapers as his incautiously open mouth imbibed a splash of mud; and the general struggling of the whole to get down at all costs, and stay down, trying to look like earth and feeling like worms. Having imagined these things as they happened in the dulness of a sodden night, feel, if you can, the intensity of that minute, while the flare burned furiously and came flaming down behind the whole party—every man waiting, his breath almost unconsciously restrained.

Would they—could they—fail to see them? To at least a half of the men lying there it seemed impossible, and yet the impossible happened.

Up again and on, panting through clamminess for the shell-holes.

Arrived at the shell-holes, part number one of the

scheme gone wrong. Each of the three parties was to have formed up under cover of the craters; but the craters, six feet or so deep, were brimming over with water and slime. The afternoon torrent of rain had done that.

Pause—dreadful pause—in the operations.

The whole of the attackers are gathered on their stomachs somehow or other outside the line of the German barbed wire, and near the gap.

Instant resolve by the leader—this is no time for delay. Must chance the parties being right. Signals the men told off for bombing the Hun sentries to advance and attack.

Rest of the attackers wait, lying very cold and numbly anxious.

Privates Macfarlane and Beazle crawl to the gap, then through it, then lie down. They fumble with their bombs in the darkness. Macfarlane is shivering with cold, but clear in mind. Beazle is tensely excited. They raise their arms at the same moment, and a second later there is one sound as of a slight splash. Macfarlane and Beazle lie very flat and wait. Those behind cannot lie flatter than they are.

Another second—then crash! and the smoke of a bursting bomb rises from the saphead.

But there is only one crash. Either one of the bombs was a “dud,” or Beazle in his excitement failed to take out the pin before he threw.

There is no answer from the saphead, and no other sound.

One of the bombs has not burst—another item in the programme gone wrong.

No matter—chances must be taken in war.

“Advance!”

No more crawling to be done. The bayonet men,

followed by the bombers, are up and through the gap, over the parapet, and into the saphead.

No. 1 bayonet man tumbles as he gets into the trench. He has kicked over something, and in doing so barely misses cutting himself with his own bayonet. No. 2 bayonet, seeing No. 1 fall, ducks, springs down in a defensive-offensive attitude, and crouches waiting. But No. 1 arises; he has only kicked over a dead German sentry. Either Macfarlane's or Beazle's bomb has worked.

Just as Captain Buckler's party get into the saphead a flare goes up on the right. It lights up the whole of the saphead. No need for this party to lie down now: they are hidden by the trench, and the light of the flare reveals the fact that the sap is empty except for a figure lying on the ground half-way down.

The leading man advances, and the whole party in the arranged order follows.

They pass over the figure lying in the sap. It is the second sentry, who has crawled a few yards and died. He lies huddled sideways, his head hunched under the trench wall. They step over him without troubling his death stillness.

The leading bayonet man goes down the sap with straining eyes and ears. As he reaches the point B—the turning-point that leads into the main enemy trench—he grips his rifle firmer, with bayonet poised, and his heart for a moment seems to stand still. Death for him is perhaps very near.

What will there be round that corner?

His pace slackens until it dies into a halt. Cautiously he peers into the dim light around the corner.

For ten seconds he stares, then turns. "All clear," he whispers back.

"All clear," passes down to Captain Buckler, then to Mr Ransom, and so on.

Stage 2 of the work is done.

Stage 3 begins.

No. 1 party to left down B C; No. 2 party to right down B D; Corporal Sangar and men to block at L.

It takes five minutes to complete these arrangements, and still no opposition met.

Captain Buckler, standing waiting at the corner B till all is ready, has time to wonder. Perhaps, after all, this bit of trench is only lightly held. The thing is going to be a walk over, and the bag no more than two sentries!

But the very moment the dispositions of attack are complete there is a sound. Certainly he heard it. The front bayonet man heard it too. "Hiss! hiss!" somewhere to the left.

The front bayonet man is holding his rifle with a terrible grip, and waiting strained for the struggle. For a few moments he had leaned against the side of the trench to rest, but that "Hiss!" sets his nerves on edge. That noise is unlike anything he had expected. Ahead of him is the terror of the unknown.

"Advance!" Captain Buckler gave the order the moment all was ready.

Along B C, down B D, the parties go.

Corporal Sangar and his men are working like furies at L, tearing down sandbags from the parapet and flinging earth into the trench. They have flung some boards and loose barbed wire a few yards ahead of the block they are making. To get the work done quicker, they are working from both sides. One man is beyond the block (not beyond the wire flung forward), trusting to get back in time.

The work proceeds well, but they are making a noise. It is unavoidable. And noise brings death.

"Come back!" shouts the corporal to the advanced man. The barrier is now more than half-made, and they can complete from the safe side.

With the noise of the work they are doing, they cannot hear the enemy's advance.

Suddenly a dark thing whirls through the air, striking the back of the advanced man just as his foot is placed on the half-made block to climb over.

The bomb falls behind him, and he dives forward wildly, but his foot slips. Crash! The smoke of the bomb clouds the trench, and the sickening smell of the explosive surges round. Crash! Another bomb.

Thud! thud! Corporal Sangar's bombers have begun, and the deep thudding boom of the British bombs answers the German onslaught.

Imagine that scene in the darkness for a moment—the throwers of bombs on each side crowded about those narrow trenches on both sides of the barrier, every bomb thrown with that peculiar arm-throw like a cricket-ball, the bomb hurtling away into darkness, the result unknown, but everywhere smoke and crash. Is it not weird and terrible? And neither side knows how many they are fighting.

The fight goes on over the dead body of the advanced man. It is eerie work all in the darkness with the smoke and smell, and very dangerous, and to Corporal Sangar it seems as if there are sounds from the German side of great numbers coming to the attack. They are coming from every side.

Corporal Sangar's men are hurling bombs furiously, and perhaps too wildly.

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While the corporal's group is working and fighting, the advance parties are moving down BC and BD.

Mr Ransom's party goes almost down to D without opposition. Then suddenly bombs begin to pour into the trench from the line DE, flung across from some concealed hole behind the corner at D. At the same moment a machine-gun starts a raking fire, the noise of which is heard, but the bullets not felt. Still there is evidence of ample opposition.

Mr Ransom halts.

His first bayonet man is only a few yards from the spot where the bombs are bursting, and crouches back as far as he may.

Mr Ransom is in doubt. Is he to carry out his orders and go on? or what? And what will happen to Captain Buckler's party if No. 2 party fails to go on?

To go through that hell of German bombs, coming from goodness knows where exactly, means death to half of them at least, perhaps to all. But on the other hand, to fail to reach D may mean death to Captain Buckler's party.

What on earth is he to do?

In the anxiety of decision Mr Ransom is sweating blood.

Meantime his bombers are hurling bombs in the direction of the enemy attack. A steady stream of crashing, thudding, murderous bombs are pouring from both sides, and bursting with dull malignity.

At that moment of Mr Ransom's anguish there is a commotion in rear of his party. For a second a wild fear rushes through his mind—the enemy have got round and are attacking in rear. The noise of fighting from Corporal Sangar's direction, and of fighting everywhere, is now continuous and fierce. The terrible crashing "oom" of bursting bombs seems everywhere, and

guns and rifles are at work too. The blackness of the night has become weirdly infernal. Just for a second his position seems desperate. Then the explanation comes. A messenger from Corporal Sangar crushes past the rear men and comes up.

"From Corporal Sangar, sir!"

"What?" he bawls.

"From Corporal Sangar to say he's being driven in, and can you send support?"

Amid the banging and shattering of bombs, the fact that the message seems to Mr Ransom to be sent to the wrong place, affects him vitally.

"Why the hell does he send here?"

The messenger says nothing.

"Mr Blantyre has the supports. Go back and tell *him!*"

Thud! Crash! Impossible for the messenger to hear.

"Go back and tell Mr Blantyre! Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! After that, go on to Captain Buckler and tell him that Corporal Sangar is heavily attacked—"

Thud! Crash!

"Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"—and may be driven in, that No. 2 party is blocked, and that Mr Ransom intends to withdraw fighting. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then repeat the message."

The messenger repeated.

"Good. Go as fast as you can. Life and death job!" Mr Ransom is bawling his commands raucously. The strain of the moment makes him talk fiercely, even when the noise does not render it necessary.

The messenger disappears in clouds of dust, darkness,

and smoke. Mr Ransom and party continue bombing to allow time for Captain Buckler's party to do whatever the commander thinks best.

When the first bayonet man of Captain Buckler's party turned the corner at B he saw nothing, but the trench B C was traversed, that is, made to curve in and out so:—



When the bayonet man came round the first traverse he was certain that he saw a Boche disappearing. Perhaps one did disappear, perhaps not. Anyhow the bayonet man passed the word to start bombing.

The bomber behind commenced pitching bombs into the trenches in front of the bayonet men, and continued throwing to clear the trenches in advance. After each bomb was thrown, the bayonet man looked round the corner to see if any Boches were still alive, and if none were seen, sent back, "All clear."

They went round four traverses like this, but still no opposition and no dead Huns to be seen.

Captain Buckler became anxious. Valuable time was flying, and bombs were being wasted, if they were not hitting.

"If there's no opposition, advance quicker," he sent forward.

The bayonet man heaved a sigh. "Stop bombing," he sent back.

Then the bayonet man plunged on madly. At every corner he felt as if death were at hand, and his heart jumped, but nothing happened until the third corner farther on.

The bayonet man saw a Hun disappear into the back of the trench wall. He was sure he saw one.

"Now or never!"

The bayonet man rushed forward to the door in the trench wall.

When he got there his heart bounded with a different feeling. The entry led down by steps, and actually there was a light burning in a great dug-out, and there were at least a score of Germans huddled together in it. The man who had gone down the entry was just free of the inner side of the entry and was rousing his comrades.

The bayonet man stood grimly with fixed bayonet at that entrance.

"Bomber forward!" he shouted to the man behind him in a hoarse whisper. "Bombs here!"

At the same moment the Hun who had entered the dug-out turned with an ejaculation of dismay. He commenced to rush out, but he was stopped by the sight of that bayonet.

The bomber coming up, flung in two bombs. To the bayonet man the noise of the bursts seemed terrific. The light in the dug-out went out, and it remained choking with smoke and sulphuric stench and death.

Immediately after the bomber came Captain Buckler. He saw that the dug-out was settled and he went ahead a few yards with another bomber and bayonet man.

In the darkness Buckler did not see any other entry to any dug-out, nor did the bayonet man or bomber, but the noise of the struggle had wakened the men hidden in another dug-out.

Suddenly a man appeared through the unnoticed opening. Buckler saw him first. The man raised his hand. Buckler's revolver cracked. The man fell. Two rounds did it all.

"Back here!" shouted Buckler.

The second bayonet man came back and held the doorway. The second bomber did his work. From the sounds of agony and confusion Buckler judged there were many Huns in that dug-out too.

These dug-outs completed, the party re-formed and advanced again.

But as they advanced, there were sounds from every side, an absolute roar of battle.

The whole business of the raid was now in progress.

From behind and around were the sounds of Ransom's and Sangar's struggles. On right, and left, and front, the artillery and trench mortars had opened fire and were pounding furiously, and Captain Buckler's own party was in the centre of danger.

Strangest and most dangerous sound of all, while pausing for an instant to listen, it seemed to Buckler as if there were a sound of many feet and many voices coming from far and near in front.

The German reserves.

It was at that moment that the message sent by Ransom arrived.

In all the circumstances, it seemed good to Captain Buckler to retire steadily. Two seconds' reflection, aided by the arrival of the first of the enemy bombs in a trench a few yards off, convinced him of the wisdom of this. "Leave the reserves to the artillery," he reflected; "we've done them a good bit of damage, if only we get out safely. Better scud for home."

Therefore he retired, holding the advancing enemy back with bombs.

On reaching point B he found Mr Ransom ready to retire, and arranged for Corporal Sangar's relief. The last few minutes were ticklish, but they got out, Buckler second last, the faithful Sangar last. The enemy had begun to swarm, but the bombs held them in check. It's an uncanny thing to advance in the darkness against an unknown number of desperate bombers. Even one is a problem.

Across the country on both sides could be seen the flashes of guns. From the trenches there was a steady rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire, and the trench mortars were busily engaged.

The Hun was particularly excited, and had completely got the "wind up."

From the manner in which his artillery was spouting violence, it was quite obvious that the Boche was under the impression that some considerable onslaught was in progress, whereas the true ratio of the thing is to be found in the description of Captain Buckler's raid by his subalterns as "some strafe."

The whole thing took just forty minutes.

When Mr Ransom found himself and also his party safely back in the British lines, in his captain's presence, he appeared to feel himself all over, as if not quite sure whether he really was the living Mr Ransom. He made an explanatory remark. "Must say, . . . at one time," he said, "never expected to see England, home, and beauty again."

"Was it as near as that?" said Buckler.

Ransom grunted.

Buckler smiled grimly to himself. "It didn't altogether follow the programme," he said. "However, it worked."

To himself he reflected that such things were in a very vivid sense a matter of "touch and go." Had his

own revolver failed to kill one Hun at the right moment a single bomb might have turned success into disaster. Any one of a dozen other chances might have done the same.

It was almost a week later before Buckler made another remark. "Whenever I think of these poor blighters in the dug-outs," he said, "I have to mutter 'Lusitania,' and the 'raped women of Belgium.'"

A remark which was typical enough.

CHAPTER IX.

NERVES.

ONE hundred and eighty raids were undertaken by the British infantry during one week over the fifty miles of line. These raids did not take place necessarily in parts of the line where the "push" was to be delivered, but were intended for the various purposes of inflicting damage on the enemy, securing prisoners for identification, and generally getting on his nerves and creating uncertainty in his mind as to where the "push" was likely to take place, if there was to be one.

In addition to these raids, activity in the air was daily assuming greater proportions. Bombing raids, reconnaissance and photographic raids, were carried out daily, often resulting in fierce and deadly encounters in the air. Not only aeroplanes, but observation balloons too were sent crashing to the ground in sheets of flame.

There was particularly great activity at the part of trench held by Captain Beaudesar's company, a thing which gave him food for thought.

In fact he had a prevision of trouble. Considerable practice in trench warfare had cultivated in him a sort of instinct by which he was often guided.

He reasoned with himself on the subject on the second morning after he had taken over trench 64. He said in his heart, "When you see the enemy going so far as to

attack your observation balloons for no reason in particular; when you see them excessively active in the air, and obviously having a special 'guy' at your bit of the line; when you see their artillery dropping a few odd shells in an unusual manner in unusual places, and you see them also employing their trench mortars to drop unpleasant projectiles in a way which suggests that they may be registering the targets,—when you see all these things happening, is it unreasonable to suppose that the enemy may be contemplating a nasty raid on you and yours?"

Reflecting on all these things, Beaudesar came to the conclusion that it was not an unreasonable supposition. In fact it accorded with his experience of warfare, and he had also the instinctive feeling that something was going to happen.

His views were further confirmed by a casual conversation with his senior platoon officer, Mr Blake.

The result of all that was, that on arriving in the trench again after the next relief, Captain Beaudesar paid particular attention to the preparation of the scheme of defence.

Needless to enter on all the military details of the scheme. Let it suffice as the main branch of the scheme that no platoon was to sit in the apology for a trench which they held, and be blown to bits in the event of being heavily shelled, but was rather to push forward with all the Lewis guns into shell-holes and meet the enemy there. There were various other arrangements providing for different events, but these never came into play.

After adjusting the scheme, and informing all his platoon commanders, Beaudesar thought it desirable to visit his next neighbours on the left, being a company of the Moultschires belonging to another brigade.

After a weary and muddy journey, done partly in a manner resembling the military physical exercise known as "on the hands, down," he scarcely felt rewarded for his trouble on meeting Captain Fizzeton.

That gentleman appeared to be hurried and worried, and in general to find life rather wearing out. Also he had a somewhat lackadaisical or bored manner.

"Came to see me about the scheme of defence? Oh yes. . . . Well, personally, I can't see that there's much in it. We either defend or we don't defend. We're either killed or not. If we're all killed we can't defend. If we're not, no doubt what's left of us'll 'carry on.'"

"Yes, but——"

"The fact is, really, that I haven't thought much about it. We've had the brigadier round here making a fearful fuss about *one* dirty rifle he found lying about. Well, of course, dirty rifle's a d—n bad offence, and all that sort of thing, but I've had enough chits about it to last me for some time. Between that and other things, I've had no time to hatch a scheme of defence, don't you see? But apart from that, they don't insist in our battalion on our writing the thing out."

"I see."

"But if you tell me your ideas, old bird, I'm sure I'll gladly fall in with any scheme that seems likely to save our skins, or endanger the enemies' more readily than another."

After Captain Fizzeton had expressed these views, Beaudesar stared at him. For a time he said nothing. Even amid the fiercest wars there is a sort of tacit understanding that officers of one regiment do not to their face criticise officers of another or their doings, or the state of their men, until after unfortunate results have happened. The criticism then takes place by Court-Martial.

Captain Beaudesar had strong feelings on the subject, both of Captain Fizzeton and the condition of his men, but he said nothing about these matters.

After a short pause, he proceeded to outline his own scheme of defence, to which Captain Fizzeton listened with polite, if perhaps tepid interest.

"Yes, old man, but we go out to-morrow night. Doubt if I've time to arrange a stunt on these lines for my fellows. . . . But you may rely on us for your flank. We'll know what you're doing, and you can feel quite safe that we won't go back anyway. . . . Quite believe your scheme may be a good one for next time when we've time to arrange it all."

Captain Fizzeton talked on pleasantly, until he eventually bowed Captain Beaudesar out. "Come and see us out of the line. Come to mess, and we'll be charmed to see you somewhere out of all this filth."

When Beaudesar went away his feelings were mixed. Fizzeton was quite a decent sort, and perhaps he was right. After all, it was quite likely that nothing would happen till after they were relieved, but——. Beaudesar could not get away from the feeling that Fizzeton's lot were not efficient, and that Fizzeton himself was not prepared for things that might very well happen. He did not realise the situation.

However, Beaudesar consoled himself with the reflection that he had done all that was possible. His own men would act, and as to the flank—well, he gave his own platoon commander full instructions as to the method which he deemed the best for forming a defensive flank, should that become necessary at any time.

About the same time that Beaudesar and Fizzeton were meeting, a much-worried colonel of the Moultschires was talking to his adjutant.

The colonel was white-faced, and his fingers twitched in a nervous manner. He was obviously very tired and holding himself under control.

Shells were falling around the shelter where the headquarters were housed, and every time a shell burst near he started slightly. Occasionally he paused in his talk to listen to the whizzing of coming shells that burst in the neighbourhood. On these occasions his face seemed to appear strained until the burst came, and then to lighten again. As the bursts were frequent, his face twitched frequently, but he held himself under stern control. He had waged war a long time, and the thing had got a little on his nerves. That was all. He was due for a month's rest in a few days, and that time was to be his last in the trenches.

Colonel Crampley talked in spasmodic bursts. "Never sure of Fizzeton. . . . He's far too slack, and the company has gone down perceptibly under him. . . . We must get somebody else, and send him down to the base, either for a rest or for good."

"Yes, sir."

"But it's the devil's own business just now to see who's to replace him——"

"He'll have to carry on till the end of the present relief," said the adjutant soothingly.

"Yes . . . I suppose so . . . But not again . . . not again."

"No, sir."

"The brigadier spoke to me personally about him when you were out——"

"Yes, sir."

"—and he has a very bad opinion of him. Says he's utterly incompetent. . . . Didn't think he was as bad as that myself, but the brigadier thinks the worst, so there's no good his staying."

"No, sir."

"And he hasn't lodged a scheme of defence. . . . Every other company commander had a scheme when the brigadier asked them except Fizzeton, and that finished him with the brigadier. . . . Anyway, send up to him for a scheme of defence to be due to-night."

"Yes, sir."

"To be here by ten o'clock without fail."

"Yes, sir."

The result of which talk was another chit to Captain Fizzeton marked "Urgent." "Please render scheme of defence by 10 P.M. to-night without fail."

When Fizzeton received it, his language was not classic. It was some little time before he got settled down to compose an essay something on the lines suggested by Beaudesar.

His second platoon commander coming in for a cup of tea, inquired pleasantly as to his occupation.

He received a gloomy answer. "More eyewash for the orderly-room. This bally chit-writing is putting years on me."

The second platoon officer gazed at his company commander in doubt, but eventually took no more interest in the matter, as he was not invited to do so. Instead, he hungrily sucked tea with plain bread and jam. As shell fire was temporarily in abeyance, he left for his own quarters immediately after tea.

The consequence of all these things was that while the adjutant received the scheme of defence at 10 P.M., it had not been communicated to the platoon commanders. Captain Fizzeton thought it was his duty to await approval of his scheme from the colonel before communicating to his subordinates.

Casual shelling continued all night around the shelter containing the headquarters of the Moultschires. At one in the morning Colonel Crampley was sitting in the shelter fully dressed listening to the shells. From time to time he yawned wearily, but he kept awake. Occasionally he glanced longingly at a straw-bed in one end of the dug-out. A dirty-looking spot it was, but it represented a full-length stretch, and the Colonel was very tired.

Macklin, the adjutant, spoke. "Won't you lie down, sir? There's absolutely nothing to keep you up. . . . If there's anything special, or any message, I'll wake you."

The colonel stared at Macklin. "I'm sorry, Macklin," he said, "but I'm feeling exceptionally tired. I'll just lie down for an hour or two. Wake me immediately if anything happens."

"Yes, sir."

The colonel rose, and stretched himself as far as he might in the low shelter. Then he lay down on a waterproof sheet placed above the straw. His coat was placed above him.

In two minutes the colonel of the Moultschires was fast asleep.

Macklin, the adjutant, still sat on. His head nodded, and he almost dozed off from time to time, but nevertheless he kept awake, his ears half unconsciously hearing the bursts of shells, the movement of feet outside, and the carrying of men and stretchers going on at a dressing station near by. The sounds reached his ears, and he heard them, but in reality they made little impression.

From one-thirty to two-thirty the time went on. From two-thirty to three-thirty, still time went on. Shells burst and feet pattered, and the adjutant kept

awake. At 4 A.M. the colonel was sleeping heavily, and the adjutant sat with his head in his hands, his elbows resting on a small table. If it is possible to understand the antithesis, he was sleeping, and yet he was awake.

It was at that hour that the storm which Beaudesar had anticipated began to burst.

The first shell fell in the centre of trench 64, exactly at two minutes past four. Two men were killed.

Mr Blake was then on duty, and he lost no time. He was not certain whether that shell was the precursor of many more or not; what he was doing might be folly or it might not; anyhow he had a feeling in his bones that this was the time, and he acted.

He sent word along the line of trench and shell-holes—"Every man get forward with the Lewis guns."

The men had been trained to expect that message, so that they also could act, and they did.

It was still dark, but in a few minutes Blake, watching, was able to see groups of men, and men in twos and threes, stealing quietly over the parapet.

As he did so, shells began every moment to increase in number, and while that evidence increased Mr Blake's faith that the expected raid was coming, it also hastened his own departure. He hastily cut along the trench to see that every man was out. But before he had gone far he realised that to continue meant certain death.

Mr Blake projected himself over the parapet, and went out into the shell-holes in the open to hold on there.

As he went forward he came upon men sliding and stumbling raggedly into position. Many of the shell-holes were half full of water, and the whole soil was oozing and sinking under his feet.

In the darkness it seemed terribly doubtful whether the manœuvre would succeed, but if it didn't, anyhow,

he consoled himself by the thought that the men's lives were being saved as they could not have been in the trench.

Would they reach the agreed line—those men and teams of gunners?

Blake tortured himself with that question. If they didn't, they might shoot one another in the dark.

They had only two small landmarks to work by. He himself reached one and waited. He brought up one Lewis gun team to the point, and saw them in position.

After that he felt better, for he knew that one quick-firing gun can slay many men. He had just begun to wonder whether he might not risk visiting the line to see the other teams, when the rapid change of events compelled his remaining where he was.

The first shell had by this time grown into a hurricane barrage of terrific intensity, bursting along trench 64 and behind it. Balls of white smoke floated around the trench, mingled with the darker bursts of other shells, and the whole scene stuck in Blake's mind as one queer mixture of bursting shell, thickness of air, luridness of light, and general strangeness of atmosphere. That vague impression of things remained in his mind alongside of the ever-present thought of imminent danger, and continuous search for the first sign of it.

Blake lay at the edge of his shell-hole intently watching.

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While Blake lay watching, Beaudesar was creeping forward with many cheeks in his advance, wriggling this way and that, to steal through the barrage. The task was one of extraordinary difficulty in the darkness. The enemy were not only firing shells and bombs, but were laying down in places a smoke barrage, the fumes

of which were slowly covering the ground, and making the maintenance of direction impossible where the ground was covered.

However, the smoke was not universal, and was not applied except behind the trench. The farther forward he went, the safer it appeared to become, and at last he reached the point where Blake's signal was to be left, if he had gone forward.

Beaudesar heaved a sigh of relief. Two crossed sticks were jammed in the parapet of the trench, and that had been the signal.

Fizzeton's trench was also under heavy bombardment, and he also came up from his dug-out and commenced to creep forward. As he went up, he grew every moment more uncertain of his course, and something like terror seized him. It was not the shell fire. He had stood a good deal of that, and was no coward. It was not the smoke barrage. It was not the fear of death.

It was the terrible thought of those men in the trench. If only they had gone forward. If only——

He knew very well where the trench was, or rather where the ill-defended muddy mess of ditch and shell-hole was, and he knew perfectly that it was being subjected to a bombardment that was hell upon earth.

The men had no orders but to hold on. They were lying there taking what cover they could, and the cover was nearly worthless. If *only* they had gone forward. If *only* they would have the sense to go forward by themselves.

The weakness of his position and the terrible position of his men grew upon Fizzeton every moment. The shells lashed and crashed around him. The air was suffocating with the stench of explosives and a dozen

other smells. Mid it all he crouched in holes, then darted forward, then lay on the ground and wriggled on—on—on, from point to point. He felt himself breathing heavily in the struggle, and he had his teeth grimly set. He was desperately, madly determined to reach that trench and find out what had happened to his men. He felt as if it were madness to try to reach, but amid all the noise and shaking of things, he had just that one desperate determination left. All thought of strategy or tactics was out of his mind. He felt himself a bad commander, but he was determined to do or die for those men.

Poor Fizzeton! He had realised too late.

Amid smoke and filth and hurtling missiles, bits of shells, lumps of earth, and dropping shrapnel, heavy-footed with clogging mud, bleary-eyed with smoke, maddened with doubts, desperately Fizzeton plunged on.

He took his revolver out as he went. He meant to do something.

At last he reached the end of the trench, or what had been a trench. By a starlight that went up for a few moments he recognised it, and for those seconds he gazed all around. He saw no enemy, but he saw none of his own.

He plunged into the trench intent on his object. The shell fire whirled about him, but he scarcely heeded. He came upon a man, seized him, and shouted wildly, "Get up! Get up!"

But the man was never to get up any more. He hung lifeless in Fizzeton's hands.

Fizzeton went on.

Another light burst from somewhere. He neither knew nor cared. He saw enough. Several men lay dead there. One of them might have been taking cover, and he shouted, "Get forward! Get forward!"

But the man never moved. Fizzeton rushed at him.

He pulled the man, then let go. The burden of the man's body fell against him with sickening limpness.

Fizzeton quitted his hold of the man and stared around.

His revolver was in his hand, and his face was to the enemy. His mind was blank but for one thought.

Call it what you will. He condemned himself in that hour. .

Berserk! Hari-kiri! Call it by any name.

He was there to hold the trench alone and die.

He had barely formed the resolution when a shell burst beside him. The shell took him, and there was no more either man or company commander to hold that line.

The brigadier was right. Fizzeton was a failure.

Ten minutes after the barrage opened, Blake felt either that the light had grown clearer, or that his eyes had grown more accustomed to the darkness.

He gazed out with increased confidence, and he saw a line of figures rise in the darkness. At first he doubted, but in three or four seconds he had no doubt.

They were coming across, unevenly, dodging shell-holes, creeping, walking, anyway apparently they could, but certainly coming.

Whichever way he looked there were figures, and the barrage had extended for half a mile or more.

Their coming was confirmed by the signals. He saw the S.O.S. float upwards in two places, and other lights streamed up in all directions.

Still there was nothing for him to do but wait. The Lewis guns had their orders. "When you get your target, shoot."

Their targets were too scattered and too uncertain yet. For a few moments it was so.

Then the guns broke forth.

For days past they had been nursed by their commanders, and fed with oil and polished and cherished. The magazines had been guarded even to the extent of being carried in men's greatcoats. The ammunition had been cared for more than the men themselves.

So now they worked. Blake could hear them despite a dozen other noises. His ear was attuned to their rattle, and he was sure that all four guns were going. Not a single one had jammed.

Fierce exultation was in his breast, and as the guns continued to rattle, those lines of figures in front disappeared and came on no more. Some of the figures turned and ran back, dropping as they went.

In a few minutes the whole attack opposite Blake was over. The line of figures had come up according to the German programme. They had advanced, they had been shot down or bolted back.

That was all. That is war.

Opposite Captain Fizzeton's trench very different things were happening. The line of figures that advanced met no resistance worth mentioning from their front. Captain Beaudesar's left platoon commander commenced to form a defensive flank, and opened fire on the right flank of the German advance. The fire of that gun reduced the enemy's numbers; but a party of sixty or more men entered Captain Fizzeton's trench, the continuation of which led to the shelter of the battalion's headquarters.

When the Germans entered the trench they were not in a very clear frame of mind. An advance over two hundred yards of ground, even if unopposed, when made in a mixture of semi-darkness, star-shell light, smoke barrage fumes, shell-bursts from both sides, and general uproar, is difficult to control; and it happened

that, of the sixty who arrived, only Schneitzer was a senior non-commissioned officer. Other officers there were none.

Schneitzer was none too clear where he was nor whither he was going. He took the line of least resistance and continued to advance over the ground in the direction of the headquarters of the Moultschires, though he was quite unaware that it was so. The barrage put down by the Germans had by that time lifted, and Schneitzer was free to proceed, though he was as much impelled forward by the thought that he would be shot if he went backward, as for any other reason.

It was not because he had a definite objective, but because forward was the only thing he could do.

But although Schneitzer was somewhat embarrassed by his success, his actions caused what was afterwards described as a "colossal wind-up" to the Moultschires.

The Huns advanced higgledy-piggledy across the open or down the trench to the Moultschire headquarters.

The first man who saw them coming was a battalion runner.

He ran on that occasion, dashed down the trench and burst into headquarters, wild-eyed, and gasping—

"They've broken through!"

The colonel had waked up with the barrage, but had not risen from his straw-bed. The adjutant was morosely awake, and waiting for a report as to what was happening.

He had not expected so dramatic an announcement. The colonel hurled his trench-coat off and bounded up. The adjutant shouted—

"Where are they?"

"Here—coming down the trench!"

The colonel did not wait to meditate or investigate.

"Get every runner, cook, and man in the place, with their rifles, and gather them here."

The runner bounded out. The runners had heard, and were already gathering.

The colonel seized his revolver and a stick, and dashed out.

For a few seconds he was dazed by the change from light to lurid semi-darkness. Then he spoke to the adjutant. "Get 'em all extended here, and wait. Send four men forward to find out."

Before he had done speaking the leaders of the German line appeared, creeping forward doubtfully.

Crack! It was the colonel's revolver.

The method of the enemy's advance struck him as hesitating, and he determined on the instant that attack, fierce and reckless, was the best defence. The enemy, in the dark, could not know how few they were.

"Yell!" he cried. "Charge!" he yelled, and, waving his stick, led up against the Hun a shrieking mob of cooks, runners, and batmen, armed with weapons of dubious value. The colonel had guessed rightly that the bayonet was his safest hope in that class of light and with the type of soldier he was at that moment leading—and it was.

The death of two by the colonel's and adjutant's revolvers produced an immediate response from the remaining Germans in the trench. It appeared that they desired to cease from fighting, and they said "Kamerad!" with one voice.

The colonel was merciful, and it was only a matter of time till he had ingathered all of the sixty, including Schneitzer, who were alive.

From the evidence of Schneitzer and other prisoners, it appeared they had orders to penetrate to the second line, and if possible hold out there, and that the raid had been made with the object of testing the strength of the line at that part, and also of disturbing the progress of any preparations for attack that had been made.

From these points of view the attack had entirely failed, and accordingly the official summary was justified when it said—

“A raid was made on our trenches last night near —, but the enemy was everywhere repulsed. Our trenches were penetrated at one point, but an immediate counter-attack drove the enemy out.”

The official summary was correct, but of all the thoughts and emotions of men, of the heroism of the dead, of the courage of the living, who fought in that weird night light in mud and misery, it is a revealing document only to those who can imagine an enormous diversity of human emotions, and extraordinary variety of military happenings, and can figure from perhaps some chance official word or phrase what possibly these happenings might be.

Perhaps the military summarist, when he wrote “an immediate counter-attack,” allowed a smile to cross his grim face when he classified Colonel Crampley’s advance with the cooks under that heading, or perhaps the summarist did not know it was a cooks’ advance.

When Colonel Crampley knew that Captain Fizzeton was dead, he said nothing for a time. After meditating a while he said, “It’s as well.”

Inefficients must either die, or get soft jobs at home or at the base, before troubles become too pressing.

CHAPTER X.

PASTURES GREEN.

"THE Division coming out."

At these magical words wonderful hopes and a sense of prospective joy and peace stole over thousands of men.

The Moultschires were relieved the night after the enemy raid, and the Garelochs farther along the line came down on the same night.

None knew why they were being relieved. That it was merely the preparatory movement prior to more strenuous endeavours was unknown to the majority. If it was known, they did not care. There was three weeks' rest immediately in the future, and three weeks ahead is long enough for the average subaltern to speculate in war-time.

Even rain and storm was not sufficient evil to depress. And every shell that burst raised a common thought in innumerable breasts. "We'll be out of it to-morrow."

"Out of it! Out of it!" What a magnificent thought to men immersed in mud, coated with filth, gradually beginning to feel worm-like under the impact of continuous shelling, and the habit of frequent crouching to cover. "Out of it" meant freedom from all the slime, all the crouching, all the bent backs due to low shelters where these existed at all, and all the incessant cleaning of arms and ammunition under conditions where these became dirty again almost immediately after they had been cleaned.

Only the pessimists were gloomy on that last day in the line, and their gloom arose only from the thought that they were bound to be killed on the last day.

"Yus, we're goin' out ternight, but wot I ses is, it's the last scutterin' bit o' shell o' the last shell fired as we're goin' out, that gets a man like me in the back. I'll believe in that rest when I gets there."

The type of pessimist with sentiments such as these is a recognised product of the great war, created by the incessant disappointments and surprises of that type of life.

The super-pessimist generally adds an addendum. "And when we gets into their bloomin' rest, we're sure to get bombed to death. Yer can't escape things in this war by movin' away, for they're sure to come after ye. If ye're for it, ye're for it every time, and no amount of personal agility's agoin' to save yer."

Pessimists such as these, however, frequently anticipate the wrong source of trouble.

The day before the relief many billeting officers from many battalions gathered together at a certain cross-roads where some motor-buses awaited them along with a staff captain.

The whole party boarded the buses and rattled off along the roads on a journey which every moment took them farther from the scenes of war.

Through narrow and boggy lanes, along poplar-lined roads, through villages, some ruined and empty, some peopled with soldiers, others with shops and civilians, the buses thundered on. Once a lorry broke down and was taken in tow by the next in front. Then the journey became even more rocky and swaying.

Officers sitting on the top of the leading bus sometimes barely escaped the fate of Absalom through the branches of overhanging trees, others missed decapitation by telephone wires stretched across the roads from swaying poles.

In fact, for miles, the journey for those on top became an exercise in body-bending, but every one was cheerful notwithstanding, and all looked forward pleasantly to the task of trying to do their neighbours out of the best billets. Best billets are a question of vital, indeed poignant interest after months in the trenches.

Probably the experiences of a billeting officer produced the lines of the dreamer:—

“ There is a billet in a smiling land,
 A great white chateau on a princely strand,
 With trees and gardens flowered and fair—
 Soft winding lanes and creeks are there,
 A house with gilded rooms and grand,
 And lesser chambers neatly planned,
 With beds becurtained and of down,
 Where soothing sleep all troubles drown,
 And fountains sparkle in the sunlit rays,
 Mid roses bordering the alley-ways;
 Sweet maidens all bedecked with flowers
 Beguile the passing of the hours,
 And furious bugles and the war-drum cease,
 And all the world lives there at peace,
 Including me !
 If such a billet could be mine,
 ’Twould be divine, divine, DIVINE.”

After journeying some distance the billeting parties were split up, and different officers proceeded in different directions to settle the quarters of their own battalions.

While travelling towards his destination, the billeting officer of the Moultschires picked up some information as to his battalion’s destination, as a result of which he said in his heart, “ I fear the worst.”

When he arrived at Gaudelis, he said, “ The worst has befallen us.”

And it had.

The Moultschires were to be billeted in a standing

camp. That was the official description of the place. As the result of a recent storm of wind and rain, however, it happened to be a lying camp, composed of tents and bivouacs, every one of which was flat with the ground, and lying in pools of water. The camp had been empty for a fortnight with the worst results. The town-major having only a staff of one lance-corporal, had been unable to cope with the situation. He had spent his time in writing memoranda marked "Urgent," to which the powers above him had not attended.

An additional handicap was that the village, which the camp adjoined, was a ruin, and there was no food to be had there.

It became obvious that rest for the Moultschires was not to be had without considerable previous work in the way of tent erection and drainage.

The staff captain had an unpleasant morning over the matter. Out of the kindness of his heart, he endeavoured to procure an advance party of a hundred or so men to enable the camp to be arranged, but his efforts were frustrated by the obstinacy of a staff official, who being never uncomfortable himself, did not realise what discomfort was for other people. The conversation proceeded on these lines by telephone.

"An advance party of 100 men. What for? . . . The tents not standing. . . . Well, what about it? The battalion gets in at 11 A.M. There are plenty of tents, and if they can't erect the whole blessed lot in two hours' time they aren't much use."

"Quite, sir. But the tents are soaking in rain, and the ground is very wet."

"Oh, well, the men who are already there can surely spread out all the tents. That doesn't take much time."

"But the men are coming down from the trenches."

"Oh, it's no good. The arrangements have all been made. Buses are d—d scarce, and it can't be done. Carry on."

The Division rang off. The staff captain cursed. The Moultschire billeting officer and the other billeters of the brigade looked glum.

But of course they had to carry on. That is war, and the luck of the game.

On arrival in camp the pessimists of the Moultschires gloomily assessed the situation.

The first pessimist said: "A nice kind o' way this to treat men after months in the trenches. Fair murder, I call it. Tell us we're comin' out for a rest, and then work us to death."

The super-grouser said: "Imphm. Might as well be back in the trenches. . . . Better, perhaps."

They erected the tents. The sun fortunately came out the day following with powerful beams and dried the tents and ground, whereupon the incident of the deserted camp was relegated to the limbo of sorrows forgotten. Except that the colonel of the Moultschires complained about the treatment of his men, and the comfortable gentleman at Divisional Headquarters was dealt with by the general himself.

The general was a warrior noted for the strength, vigour, and directness of his language, and on this occasion his views were strongly in favour of the men. In slow and emphatic manner he said to the officer who happened to be responsible: "Your failure to permit an advance party to be sent is an instance of that pig-headed incompetence and d——le officialism which I thought had been banished from my staff. Your first consideration ought to have been the welfare of those men, and you ignored it. If you or any other staff officer fails in the same way again, they will be banished from my staff."

The general was very angry. The major was astonished.

The Garelochs were more fortunate in the billeting struggle. They went to another part of the country, and as their buses rolled along the roads, they realised that they were entering a fat and well-favoured part of the land of France.

Away from the dust and noise of battle; away from dust-covered huts and thronged roads, back to the land of green pastures they rushed.

They dismounted from the buses about a mile from their destination and marched through a village to their billets in farm-houses and barns.

After the dust and mire there was many a man who realised perhaps for the first time in his life what green pastures are.

Captain Hazlitt and his officers were billeted in a farm of the usual square class, with a midden in the centre. But around the farm were green fields and a duck-pond where white ducks swam, unconscious of the great war; and dreamy cattle moved about, and shaggy farm horses tramped solemnly backward and forward daily to work; and Marie, the farmer's daughter, clattered about her work in big boots, laughed to the officers and talked to them when they in a philosophic moment, or in the hope of practising the French language, or out of *cameraderie*, thought fit to chat to her. Marie was quite pretty in spite of her rather clumsy attire.

She said that she loved the "Ecoissais," but thought the kilt as a dress was *très choquante*.

Marie, they gathered, quite enjoyed the great war. Her father was making money, and she got more fun out of it than she had ever had in her life before.

Marie had quite a collection of souvenirs and curios collected during the progress of the war from successive

occupants of the house. Indeed she pouted her lips, and practically "held up" the officers in that matter. Of course she was always cheerfully ready to balance matters by adjusting the milk supply, a proceeding regarding which a careful mother occasionally made observations.

Marie was strong and a spirited wench. To Mr Travers' knowledge she boxed the ears of a batman who became too pressing in his admiration, and laughed very much over the exploit afterwards.

Marie cast a favourable eye on Mr Travers, but she did not know that he wrote to his girl at home in endearing terms a letter in which she was mentioned, and in which he said—

"We are at last out of the trenches for a time—thank goodness—for I was most awfully fed-up with them this time. Now we are back in one of the best billets we've ever struck. It's a jolly farm with green fields and a healthy feeling about it. The sun has come out to-day, and we are all feeling as if we were on summer holidays. It's absolutely topping.

"The people are decent too, and there's a French kid called Marie, who's most amusing. We all rag her and she's great fun. She milks the cows and runs about the kitchen, and she's really quite good-looking—the only one of the kind we've ever struck. But you needn't be jealous yet!"

Of course all this may seem to have nothing to do with General Drakelin's plans, but in reality it did have to do with them, as rest prior to the offensive was a necessary part of the scheme.

The better the rest, the more the bodies and minds of the troops were refreshed, the better the chance for the success of the scheme.

PART II.

THE PLOTTERS

CHAPTER XI.

H.Q.

THERE is a glamour about the magic letters "H.Q." And the newly-joined subaltern, as he passes the building outside which the sentry with fixed bayonet stands, and above the gate of which floats the red flag with the white cross, unconsciously realises a feeling of awe.

There—inside there—within that veritable building, somehow, somewhen, are hatched those schemes whereby the destinies of thousands, nay of millions of men, perhaps of whole races of men and of empires, are being decided. And among those destinies, the most nearly interesting to that newly-joined "pip-squeak" are his own; they too are in a distant way being decided there.

If haply the general should appear in the doorway, or in his car, the aforesaid newly-joined marching at the head of his platoon gathers himself together for a great effort and shouts furiously, "Eyes—right!" His platoon twist their necks and march past in that twisted fashion until the boy shouts furiously again, "Eyes—front!" The platoon adjust their heads and march on. The general returns the salute according to his nature and occupation.

If the general is not visible, the boy gazes eagerly at the building, striving mentally to tear its secrets out,

but "H.Q." are immutably stolid. The sentry is also immutable, and, generally speaking, an excellent sloper of arms.

General Drakelin's headquarters were situated in a large white house surrounded by white walls and a considerable garden. Beyond the flag and the sentry there was nothing to indicate any special wonder, unless it were the notice posted on the roads addressed to traffic, "Army Headquarters—Drive slowly."

A military policeman was visible in the street. Probably he was connected with protective duties of the house.

A small dog barked idly in the sun near the sentry, and a large dark-blue coloured car stood at the entrance.

The street in which the house was situated led into the main square of the town where the Headquarters were, and through the open windows of the house the strains of the music of a band could be faintly heard coming from the square, and the steady tramp of the feet of men marching past to the music of the band.

The band was playing on a wooden stand set up in the middle of the square. They played there sometimes by the general's orders when troops were known to be passing through, simply to cheer the men *en route*. That was known to the staff as one of the "old man's" little fads. While noticing these odds and ends, however, the staff worshipped the "old man," and Drakelin himself was quite aware that the band performance was so irreverently referred to.

While the band played, typists working on the ground floor of the house typed on steadfastly except one, who occasionally cursed the band for distracting his attention. He was a lover of music and had a strong desire to go out and listen to the band, but he was too busy.

In another room of the house an architect was

working steadily on a map. He was one of the general's "finds."

General Drakelin happening to visit a brigade, asked one of the men what he did before he joined the army. He stated that he was an architect. The man was tested and passed into the general's service, where he proved to be the very man required, and received rapid promotion. "Every man in my army carries a Field-Marshal's baton in his knapsack." To that dictum Drakelin heartily subscribed, and carried out the principle where he found merit to justify advance.

At another house some distance away another man was engaged in a different yet similar task. He was toiling over a model of a certain part of the line—a model on which every phase of the ground was reproduced on a tolerable scale, so that the whole area appeared exactly as it was in nature. Hills, rivers, roads, pathways—everything was there, with the trenches and posts outlined. A glance at the model gave an immediate and vivid idea of the ground and all its military possibilities.

In yet another place a man was poring over certain aeroplane photographs taken during a recent raid. Around him were various instruments, plans, and maps. From time to time he referred to different items of these, and he continually made notes.

At the same time, in a part of the same house, an officer was busily reading notes of evidence taken from prisoners. From time to time he also made notes. He also examined the prisoners' statements alongside of other papers and reports which he had on the table.

In the Headquarters the telephones were, as usual, busily engaged, and messengers came and went from the signal department almost continuously.

But all the time the band played in the square, and

one or two men on relief in the telephone department lay on their backs on the floor and listened to the music, in so far as they could hear it above the noise of people talking at the telephone and other telephone noises.

The whole thing was more like a great business than suggestive of war. Had it not been for the uniforms of the officers and orderlies, a stranger might have mistaken the place for a department of some great wholesale concern.

The telephoning was as troublesome as any civil telephone. "Hello there! Hello there! Have you got that? . . . Yes, to-morrow afternoon. . . . Yes. . . . Yes . . . three . . . yes three . . . pip emma . . . *pip emma*. . . . Repeat. . . . Yes, that comes under remounts. . . . No, not the eightieth, the ninety-first . . . *ninety-first*. . . ."

With several telephones working, the war of words went on all day with wearisome iteration.

The chief difficulty of a stranger paying a visit would have been to determine what class of store the place was, for every subject under the sun, from mules to operation orders, and from food to great guns, appeared to be heard of at some time or other.

But these telephones merely represented the outworks of the department. The real live wires penetrated into the rooms of staff officers where more important conversations took place, mingled with casual conversations regarding leave, invitations to dinner, &c.

In one of those inner rooms a big man with the badges of colonel on his sleeves stood at a window. He was fully six feet high and very soldierly in build. His hair was slightly grey, and his face was of the stern type usually associated by the public with commanders of the Kitchener order. His eyes were of blue, and possessed a kind of deadly fixity which seemed to

pierce a near object and at the same time to be gazing into distant space. His face formed a perfect mask to his thoughts, which were always unreadable.

General Drakelin was a totally different type of man, but he valued Colonel Berdelin as he valued few men. Yet he was in the habit of remarking that he never had the faintest idea what Berdelin thought until he spoke.

Berdelin seldom exceeded a grim smile, and his conversation outside of military subjects was as nearly as possible reduced to nil. His views on women—that interesting test of a man's survey of life—were unknown. General Drakelin was married, and his wife, who really liked Berdelin, had sworn to ascertain what he thought about women sooner or later, but she had so far not advanced much in her inquiry.

Altogether Berdelin was regarded as rather a mystery man, but it was he who was held to be the embodiment of the phrase "the brain of the army." That is a newspaper term generally ridiculously unjust, but in his case it was perhaps as just as such eulogy could be. General Drakelin at least relied on him implicitly.

The uncertainty of Berdelin's line of thought was evidenced at the moment by an incident. He turned from the window and rang a bell. A lieutenant entered.

"Tell the sentry at the gate to slope his arms properly."

"Yes, sir." The lieutenant went out.

Laconic order, laconic answer—result, duty done. That was Colonel Berdelin.

He turned from the window and sat down at a table. As he did so, the line of ribbons on his breast came more prominently into light. The line was two deep, and showed war service in many parts of the world.

As he sat down, he carried on in his mind the line

of thought on which he had been thinking at the window. The matter of the erring sentry had been merely incidental.

In front of him, on the table, was a sheet of paper, on which a number of lines were drawn in pencil. Farther back on the table were several plans, typed reports, an aeroplane photograph with analysis attached, and farthest back of all was a clay model of part of the country in which the army were operating.

As he sat there he appeared to be doing nothing, but in reality his mind was filled with a maze of questions. Under General Drakelin he was the great unifier of all the problems of all the departments. It was he who gathered up the threads of every question affecting the army in so far as relating to strategy, and it is to be remembered that the most perfect strategy and tactics may fail if the man in the ranks lacks bully beef.

For that reason Berdelin, as he sat there motionless, was surveying the whole arena of the battlefield, measuring the probabilities and the possibilities, and calculating what things might or might not be possible. War is a great game of hazard, and even the greatest of leaders may find some things impossible.

As he sat thinking, he was following his favourite analytical method prior to a great battle. In his mind's eye he saw before him the whole field of operations. He knew the ground thoroughly, and even the small woods and low rising grounds were in his view; but by his method of reconstructing the elements of the situation he was going over every point.

The railroads came first in his mind, those certain means by which men were to be brought up and hurled into battle at the commencement of the fight. That was easy, comparatively. The concentration of hundreds of thousands of men, when done without opposition and in

your own time, was not a matter to baffle a soldier. But that first concentration was not the real difficulty. Supposing the attack failed altogether, or failed in part—it was his business to provide for either event—what of the concentration of reserves to meet the rebuff or to stem a retirement? Suppose there had to be a further concentration for that, how many hundred thousand were required, and if required, how would they come?

But even that possible concentration was not all that might be required. Supposing the enemy delivered a strong counter-attack adjacent to the point of attack, or farther along the line, and were partially successful or altogether successful, what would be the result on the available railroads in bringing up men for that purpose, or for both purposes, should men be required for both at the same time?

The possibility of confusion arising on the lines owing to the moving of such large bodies of men remained in his mind for a time.

He reflected for a considerable time on the positions to which reserves could be brought, and gazed steadfastly on two slender lines marked in green on a map placed on his left. Both of these lines terminated in a railhead where half a dozen trains could be run in and unloaded.

The railroad question apparently troubled him, and he made several calculations on a piece of paper. It was not the first concentration nor additional concentration that troubled him, but the possibility of a double concentration.

Eventually he left the question over on his notes for consideration with the general.

From rails he passed on to roads. The completion of special work ordered had been reported, and the existing roads were stated to be in sufficiently good

condition. The work of the Chinese battalions had not apparently been in vain.

In another plan before him every road and track was marked in different shades of colour according to class, and bridges and roads were marked for artillery or not.

As he gazed at these roads, he speculated for a little on their connections with the lines of rail. There was also present in his mind the problems of space and numbers and time. The attack intended might consume months of time, during all of which there would pour up and down these roads one almost perpetual stream of men and guns and transport. Was there room enough and roads enough to stand that strain?

He subdivided the roads again in his mind, and thought of the roads more distant from the attack, and then of the near approaches to the battlefield. He went over the question carefully in his mind over an area of many miles. As he thought of these heavily-shelled approaches, and those duck-board tracks over mud which existed in several places, he saw in his mind the possibility of disaster through the failure of the communications.

That question, too, he noted for consideration with the general. The definite limits and method of advance had not been absolutely determined, and there was still time to alter certain features.

From road communication he passed to signals. That, however, did not occupy him long. He was satisfied that the signals were under exceptionally efficient control, and also there was before him a scheme of the signal communications, which showed that only advanced work remained to be done, and that behind an efficient system of communication was already running.

As regards communication from the forward posts, he

reflected that that was always "the devil's own trouble." No matter what was done, or how well buried wires might be, shell fire blew telephone wires to bits, or killed the runners, or the lamps couldn't be seen, or some unfortunate incident happened. Still, the utmost must be done, and would be done. He noted casually on paper the word "pigeons." He considered that pigeons had not been as well utilised as they might have been on a previous occasion. Pigeon orderlies had brought the birds back in their cages, never even having been freed.

The word "aeroplanes" passed through his mind, but that was a matter of course.

A series of other questions passed one by one in review across his mind. On almost every question he had a report from some department. On many of the questions he had several reports, but he scarcely troubled to refer to them. He had the salient points of them all in his mind. The scheme and the points of it had been his main concern for months past, and the progress of the whole he knew as probably no other man in the army did, for he, under General Drakelin, was the unifier.

The work he was then doing in his mind was, on a large canvas, the equivalent of the work so often supplied in staff colleges for the training of staff officers—the framing of an appreciation of the situation; but the work differed in this, that the scale was enormously beyond ordinary staff work, and that other considerations applied which were outside the limits of an ordinary appreciation. The results of the decisions which would be taken as a consequence of this appreciation would affect hundreds of thousands of men, thousands of miles of ground travelled or marched over, and large areas of frontage. As he sat there, Berdelin could realise intui-

tively the roads packed with transport, the marching weary men, the straining horses, the lumbering guns, farther up the crashing fire, the smoke of battle, the dead, the crowding forwards of those that were going up, and backwards of the wounded and stragglers coming down, and so on—it all existed in panorama in his mind, and with that panorama before him his mind fixed on the weak points for which he was searching. He noted them all on that bit of paper.

Last of all, he considered the state of the trenches on the places marked.

From these he crossed over to the enemy side, and proceeded to consider their advantages and disadvantages. Their rails and roads, their chances of concentration, the disposition of their troops, the nature of the ground from strategical and tactical points of view, all these and half a dozen other questions passed before him, and on these matters also he made notes.

But while he made these notes there were only one or two to which he really attached importance for the purpose of the decision for which he was then preparing. The other notes were only for use to enable further orders to be issued.

The notes to which he attached special importance at the moment were only three in number, which he jotted on a separate note in words which conveyed sufficient to himself.

Where? Strength and weakness.

When? Light and weather.

How?

At the end of his review the colonel glanced at his watch and discovered that it was after four o'clock. He rose, went to the mess-room and had a cup of tea and half a slice of toast.

His tea occupied about ten minutes, after which he

returned to his task. Some of the junior members of the staff turned on the gramophone after tea, and the strains of

“I want to marry—’Arry”

floated up the stair to his room, but he scarcely noticed. He was absorbed in his task. He found war interesting. It was his life’s occupation.

The general was not in, and a little later downstairs in the mess-room the junior members started to dance to the air of a reel on the gramophone. That made rather more sound, and there was laughter and tramping of feet, but still the colonel paid no attention. General Drakelin approved of his officers being merry, if they felt inclined. Colonel Berdelin had no feelings one way or other. The red-tabbed juniors referred to him alternatively as “Bird-alone” or “the holy terror.” They stood in awe of him, however, as a strategist and soldier.

As the junior staff hopped about they made remarks. “Poor old Bird-alone,” said one. “Couldn’t we get him down to have a dance?”

“Not much, old thing. You’d disturb his train of thought.”

“Oh, hang his train of thought. When does he enjoy himself?” This from a recent arrival.

“He’s doing so now, my son.”

“Is he? Well, don’t fancy his idea of pleasure.”

“Ah, but he’s the brain of the army, and the *ultima*, or is it the *ultimus* word in military science! You can’t be all that and carry on like ordinary mortals.”

“Thank heaven I’m not the *ultimus*.”

“Well, you’re quite safe not to worry on that score.”

There was a ripple of laughter from the others, and an exclamation from the victim.

Up above, Colonel Berdelin was working on quite unconscious of the controversy below.

At half-past four a car rolled up to the entrance, and the general came in to tea immediately after.

By his manner he seemed busy, and he took tea hurriedly. Sometimes he was quite different, and laughed and joked with his staff.

After tea he went upstairs.

When he entered Berdelin's room the colonel rose. The general went towards the table and they both sat down.

The general stared at the papers and notes. "Well?" he said inquiringly.

"Have you seen them?" asked Berdelin.

"Yes, I have seen all three commanders, but I'd like to have your views independently."

Berdelin nodded. He reflected a few moments before he spoke, and then he spoke slowly.

"I have come to be of opinion that scheme I. should be preferred."

"Why?"

"Scheme III., we are all agreed, is out of the question." Berdelin looked at Drakelin questioningly.

The general nodded.

"It rests between I. and II. . . . The nature of the ground in both cases is comparatively similar, and advantages and disadvantages might be said to be fairly evenly balanced. Indeed as regards ground only, perhaps II. is preferable to I. On the other hand, I. presents a few advantages in the way of cover. But altogether, II. is to my mind the most favourable and most likely." Berdelin paused.

"Well?"

"Scheme I. is also less well favoured in the matter of roads and approaches, but the roads which do exist are

of better class and more durable. The exact state of the roads is less likely to be information available to the enemy."

"Yes."

"On the road question, if I were the enemy, I think it probable that I would consider the roads under scheme II. much more likely for the purpose of offensive than under scheme I."

"That may be."

"On many other questions the chances as between I. and II. are perhaps not very different. But there remains the question of the enemy's disposition and lines."

Drakelin nodded again.

"The enemy lines of communication are much better on ground opposite our proposed scheme I. than on ground opposite scheme II. These powerful lines of communication exist in a place where our lines are apparently weaker. The fact that the enemy thinks so is evidenced by the reports that reach us, and it is what one would expect. He does not hold against I. strongly because he believes he can reinforce very easily at very short notice. The depth of the distribution of his troops is there as one to two in other parts, including the part opposite our scheme II."

"That is the latest report?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go on."

"In addition to all that, we know that General von Dressler commands opposite the ground for scheme II., and General Bissingen opposite ground for scheme I. . . . Dressler is sent where trouble is expected. Bissingen is . . ." Berdelin paused reflectively. Then he resumed. "Bissingen is a Prussian autocrat in favour with the German throne, but not usually sent where difficulty is

expected, and the class of troops which he commands tends to confirm the expectation that an attack is not expected there."

Berdelin ceased speaking. The general stared at him. "We're taking considerable risks," he said eventually.

"Yes, but also considerable chances." Berdelin leaned forward slightly and spoke with more animation. "I saw Bissingen," he said, "before the war at army manœuvres in Germany. Of course I saw comparatively little of the manœuvres excepting the show part. We were very carefully watched by the staff detailed. But I did see and know Bissingen, and I am certain that he is weak. A rapid success will probably make him hesitate, in which case honest men may make good. Probably Dressler's reserves and Dressler himself will be sent in support when they find out what is happening, but then it should be too late."

"It should ; but will it ?"

"That's our chance, and the bombing squadrons ought to attack their lines of communication with exceptional force immediately before and during the attack."

The general nodded. "Well, I agree," he said. "We're all agreed except the Eightieth Corps. But we'll need to walk warily. I'm glad you came to the same conclusion independently. And it's useful your knowing about this Bissingen fellow."

"Yes." In thought Berdelin's mind went back to a scene several years before—a scene in which a vast mass of cavalry, charging across a plain with waving swords and thundering hoofs, had made one of the most remarkable spectacles he had ever seen ; but at the thought of it he smiled slightly. That mimic warfare had been so grotesquely unlike the real thing. That had been his idea at the time, he recollected. "Magnificent, but not war." The South African War had contained nothing

remotely resembling that performance, and the present war had been equally unfavourable. However, he dismissed that stray reflection and returned to the concrete affair. "I remember Bissingen quite well," he said. "A big brusque fellow, carrying on all right when things went well, but apt to be upset and blustering if anything went wrong. . . . Of course, he's almost certain to have some powerful support on his staff, probably Colonel Kreissler."

"Ah."

"If it were Kreissler he would be the real man and Bissingen the figurehead, just as Ludendorff is the real man and Hindenburg useful as a poser for busts for the populace to drive nails in."

Drakelin smiled, then he almost laughed. "And Berdelin and Drakelin——" He left the idea to imagination.

"No," said Berdelin, "it doesn't always work so. Von Dressler is the real man and he is the general."

General Drakelin chuckled. The relations between himself and his chief of staff were extraordinarily friendly. Each knew and understood the properties of the other, and the combination was extremely happy.

In another moment the general had deserted the side-issue and returned to work.

"Well, I expect we'd better have a conference as soon as possible."

"Yes."

"I don't care for these conferences. But still I expect we'd better have it. Just a lot of talk resulting in very little, and in the end it always comes to our allotting the jobs to be done just the same. Still we'd better have it and at once. They can all be here the day after to-morrow."

The colonel bowed.

"I'll read all these reports I haven't read," said the general, "and also look at anything else you think I should see."

"Yes, sir."

"And I think you're quite agreed that the sooner the better, so far as the weather allows, and all the final preparations should be pushed on at top speed."

The colonel nodded. The general rose and went out, carrying a bundle of papers.

He looked tired. He had motored about sixty miles that day, made two speeches, presented a number of medals, addressed a meeting of officer students at the Army School, seen a demonstration of training, visited two corps generals, and inspected two districts as he passed through, with special reference to the coming operations.

Above all, there was upon him the burden of care. True, he carried it lightly, but the responsibility of a great army, and the lives of hundreds of thousands of men, has its effect, even if that effect is not consciously felt.

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After dinner that evening one of the staff played the piano for a time.

The general sat in an arm-chair by the fire and listened. Nobody spoke to him, and he lounged for a quarter of an hour listening to the music, smoking a cigar, and gazing into the fire.

It was a tacit convention among the staff that the general got a quarter of an hour's relaxation after dinner, and that somebody played the piano. The practice had grown up, because the general had come to find that a quiet quarter of an hour listening to music was a soothing antidote to the cares of war. He

felt rested and soothed by harmony so different from the clash and strivings and jarrings of war.

Peace, rest, harmony—all the antithesis of war. The class of music which the general favoured was of the rippling melodious order; as he himself expressed it, the sort of thing that reminds one of “the skipping lambs and the babbling brooks.”

Unconsciously perhaps he sought what he found restful.

At the end of his quarter hour he returned to the business of being a fierce and determined soldier. .

CHAPTER XII.

CORPS.

THE conference with corps commanders was an event of considerable magnitude. The number of commanders to be present was large, not because all the corps would be immediately required, but because sooner or later at some stage of the push they might all come in. Once a great operation is opened in war, it is impossible for any man to foresee where it may end. The consequences of success or failure sweep from one end of the line to the other—from France to Italy, from Italy to Russia, from Russia they react through Palestine, through India and Africa the whole thing is surging and whirling, and the wisest commander in the world cannot with any certainty predict the exact issue.

Of course General Drakelin had merely to deal with the actions and reactions affecting his own frontage, but the contemplated advance involved the transfer of numerous corps and divisions, an exchange which was even at the hour of conference proceeding.

Divisions changed their corps, corps became parts of other armies, and so on; the process circled continually, the weaker divisions giving place to the stronger for the purpose of attack, and themselves taking over those parts of the line that could be more easily or lightly held, or going into rest.

To picture this war at all, the imagination must never lose sight of the incessant movement of everything and everybody—incessant change involving those mighty train-loads running, running, ever running, night and day, those workshops running, running, ever running to keep those lines and rolling-stock going, those toiling men and horses and mules and buses, and the whole thing working over Europe and the world in million upon million.

There is no word less than prodigious which can express the thing. Literally prodigies are being worked. It is because the prodigies are worked in compartments that the thing is possible.

As each corps commander whirled along the road in his car to H.Q., he thought nothing about the prodigious nature of the war, but much about the job which he thought might fall to him.

Comparatively speaking, the public hear little of corps commanders. Perhaps an occasional despatch mentions that ——— commanded the 90th Corps in certain operations, or into the periodical shower of K.C.B.'s decoration descends on some one who is mentioned as commanding the ——— Corps. But otherwise they do their work, and are perhaps a trifle apt to be lost sight of between the army commander and the divisional commanders.

One certain fact about corps commanders is that as figures in the great war they are decidedly picturesque. Their arrival for the inspection of, say, a battalion flings the mind back inevitably to Shakespeare, with his excursions and alarms, or side-notes, "Ruffle of drums. Enter the Duke of Oporto."

When the corps commander appears, there sounds the ruffle, and the battalion presents arms. These features are happening in the field in the midst of the great war,

and unless occasionally mentioned, any one may fail to note how the world carries on the same interesting embroidery even in desperate times.

To return to the action, the different commanders moving to the army headquarters talked to their subordinates, or were silent according to their inclination.

Major-General Boulder was in his usual robust spirits as he moved off, and was employing his usual vigorous language. He chatted for a moment to another general he happened to meet.

The other general spoke first. "Hello, what's up now?"

"Oh, another conference!"

"Another!"

"Oh yes. Quite sound, too. Rather be in Drakelin's army than anywhere."

"You would?"

"Yes, any day. The man's full of fight. He and Berdelin together are the finest combination we've got on this front."

"I daresay."

"Oh yes. . . . And we're going to have a hell of a push this time."

"So I hear."

"Yes, and my corps never was fitter than it is now."

"Good."

"Yes, excellent. We must get an opportunity this time at the beginning of the show. We've had to do the clearing-up business for other people too often. We must kick off."

"They'll all want that."

"Well, d—n them, we must have our chance."

The other general smiled. "Wish you luck," he said as Boulder drove off.

Boulder's car tore across France at a rate which suited his frame of mind, because he felt full of the offensive spirit.

Major-General Claythorpe was a totally different type. He was a quiet man, saying little, and looking very reserved. As his car whirled along, he said nothing about the prospective conference, but discussed agriculture and the possibilities of soil which had been subjected to severe shell-fire or gas.

Major-General Dentler was yet another type. As a subaltern he had had the reputation of being cool and daring. As a general he was known as a stern disciplinarian. Death was nothing to him, either for himself or any other person. His main business was the winning of victories; his special interest was sanitation.

There were many other types among those generals in the rushing cars, on whose account the traffic was stopped at the cross-roads. The result when they were all gathered together in General Drakelin's room was impressive.

By their military training, by their service in many parts of the globe, soldiers inevitably gain a certain style and appearance which tends to create effect.

Those tanned faces that have known the suns of India; those eyes that have been used to shoot in the wilds; those lips that have commanded, where at times there was little to support the command except the force of the individual,—all these things working together produce certain results.

And these results were present in the case of the generals. They were imperial soldiers most of them, with many medals. The atmosphere of the rooms, the subtle touches of red, the quiet grimness of a number, all proclaimed a gathering of men. And yet they

only represented one Army of the several Armies on the Western Front.

General Drakelin sat at the head of the table, with Berdelin on his right.

Every general had in front of him a map.

General Drakelin opened the conference by a statement of its purpose, followed by an indication of the possibilities of the two suggested schemes, and a full explanation of the advantages of the scheme which he had determined upon under general sanction from above and in consultation with the senior corps commanders. He also explained the reasons why the final decision had only then been taken, and how that affected the situation, and mentioned the results which it was hoped would accrue.

He directed special attention to the urgent necessity which existed for striking hard at the outset of the attack, and of the necessity for doing everything possible immediately to follow up that attack.

He called their attention to the state of the German armies opposite, to their weakness near —, and to the names of the generals commanding, and gave a statement of what was believed to be the character of the generals concerned.

He also specially directed their attention to the risks of the scheme, and the measures which could be taken to provide for these risks.

After the general had finished speaking, a discussion commenced and ranged over the whole issue; but while Berdelin noted a few suggestions, no material point of difference was raised. General Drakelin was in the habit of hearing discussion on such questions.

After the general discussion there followed a prolonged consideration of the question of the forces at the disposal of the different corps, and the times and

methods by which they should be utilised. Needless to enter on all these details. Suffice that both Major-Generals Boulder and Dentler gained assent to their requests that their troops might be placed first in the attack. General Drakelin was the more ready to agree, because he wished to have armies attacking who would be likely to strike fiercely at the commencement.

The fact that the 90th and 101st Corps were to be among the first was not gratifying to all the generals, because they all thought that the first attack was the easiest—that being the attack of which the enemy would have the least warning.

PART III.
THE DOERS OF THE DEED



CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARATIONS AND THE DIVISIONAL GENERAL.

WHILE generals were engaged in consultation, while forward divisions and brigades were engaged in the work of digging trenches and immediate approaches, and while a score of other preparations were going forward, the 971st Brigade was engaged in preparing for battle.

The methods of their preparation may appear singular. The idea of the thing may be gathered from the chits issued by the Gareloch Battalion's Orderly Room: "Company commanders will please attend a conference on Brigade Sports this afternoon at 3 P.M."; "Company commanders will please render a list of the names of men entering for the 'Tossing the Caber' competition," and so forth.

Muddled oafs in football costume appeared to the local inhabitants to be engaged exclusively in running about the country like escaped lunatics; while others spent their time in heaving about tree-logs, or hanging on to the end of a rope tied to the largest available tree the while one of their number bawled at them inarticulate sounds and waved his arms with a sweeping movement. This last operation attracted

perhaps more attention than it deserved, because the most suitable tree and piece of ground in the district for the purpose of practising the tug-of-war was situated in the centre of the village square.

The tug-of-war is not an institution of the French village, but it attained decided favour in the village of Bordelis, especially on account of M'Cheyne. Whenever he appeared on the scene with the rope, there was a whisper ran round the village, and they gazed on him while they said, "Quel homme!"

"Mon Dieu!" they cried, when they heard the rope creak, "he'll pull the tree down!"

M'Cheyne was the mightiest man in the battalion—six foot two, and of extraordinary breadth and strength.

To see him was to be reminded of the days of old—the Vikings and legendary heroes.

The mornings for the Garelochs were spent in special battle preparations, the afternoons in preparing for the brigade sports.

The sports actually came off about midway between their arrival at Bordelis and the time of their departure for the battle.

Preparation for brigade sports, in addition to the battle preparations, involved considerable work and worried the company commanders considerably, and they groused fervently at times. "Good Lord! have they forgotten there's a war on?" These and various other growls were the cry of the harassed company officers; but that half of their troubles came to an end on the great day, and there was no sign of the previous tribulation when the sun shone out on the morning of the —, and the pipes and drums battered lustily as each Highland battalion entered the field.

The day was also a gala day in the district, and French children ran about laughing and shouting in glee. There were great marquees raised for each battalion, with nourishment for all, and a race-course laid out under the auspices of the sports committee.

Never in the best days of their peace-time life had the villagers seen such a spectacle. It was a gathering of the clans in the heart of France.

Marie was there in her holiday best, with a fragment of tartan pinned under her brooch, partly engaged in gazing open-eyed at some of the competitions, and partly occupied with her admirers. Another interesting figure was an old French schoolmaster, who walked about with a perpetual smile on his face. He was willing to talk to any one who could babble two words of his language. He had apparently been reviving his knowledge of the relations of the Scots and French, or else knew the history well in any event, because he talked about the days when the French sent soldiers to Scotland. He appeared to be happy.

About ten o'clock the Divisional General Halgrave arrived. Those who had not seen him before looked at him with interest. They would always have been interested to see the divisional general, but at the moment interest was keener, because they knew that it was he who was to lead them in the push. A corps commander is a distant figure to the average soldier, a man seldom seen, but the divisional general is their man. It is he who is in comparatively direct touch with them. If they have confidence in him, he is "the man we know." If they haven't, or don't know him at all, the division unquestionably suffers.

As he entered the field, General Halgrave appeared

cool and stern and soldierly, as he always was. He was a tall man, who wasted no energy, but yet he was full of fire and determination, and he never hesitated to exhibit his pride and affection for his own troops. His personal habits and manner were remarkably simple.

He chatted for a time to the brigadier and colonels, and afterwards spoke to many of the other officers and men. The formality of some one who held himself superior to his men was utterly absent from him, and he entered into the games with enthusiasm and zest.

When he saw the great M'Cheyne hanging on to his end of the rope, with a number of the men in front of him slipping and falling; when he saw M'Cheyne, the last hope for the moment, hanging on with grim desperation, his muscles straining and the sweat pouring from his brow in great beads, and when he heard the shouting, Halgrave laughed gleefully and shouted with the rest, "Stick it, M'Cheyne!"

When M'Cheyne had stuck it, he congratulated him, and after talking with him, discovered that he had been a band boy when he (Halgrave) was a subaltern of the same regiment. He shook hands with M'Cheyne with unfeigned pleasure.

Wherever the general went after that he spread enthusiasm and goodwill.

He roamed about the ground, and met a subaltern whose face he recognised.

"Now where have I seen you before?"

"I think at Ypres in 1915, sir."

"Yes, yes, Hill 60. I have it. I remember."

"Yes, sir."

"And here you are back again. I'm meeting nothing but old friends to-day. I'm delighted. This augurs well for the battle. It's a case of sending the old guard into action."

The subaltern smiled.

"And what have you been doing since 1915?"

"Well, I was wounded, sir, and went home. After that I came out again, and was wounded in trench warfare. When I got better I came out again, and was wounded at the Somme, and now I'm back again."

"You're back again." The general's voice thrilled with pride and enthusiasm. "Ah, splendid fellow! Splendid fellow, I say! Here you are again just in time for the push."

The general shook hands, and moved to other work of inspiration. He felt greatly encouraged by the evidences of spirit which he saw in the brigade.

His thoughts might have been modified a little (but perhaps not) if he had heard his friend, the subaltern of 1915, talking to one of his brothers in arms. In moments of stress he occasionally indulged in what he took to be Irish. "Begorra and bejabers, and did ye hear what he said?"

"No, old thing. But you seemed to be very thick with him."

"Faith, he said, 'Splendid fellow, you're just in time for the push,' after I'd just done telling him I'd been three times wounded already, . . . and he seemed to expect me to look fearful pleased about it."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the compatriot. "That's fiery Freddy all over."

"I haven't the remotest desire ever to enter a ruddy battle again," said the 1915 soldier grumblingly. "I don't mind going in, but surely nobody supposes I specially like it."

"Oh, *you* have another talk with Freddy, and you'll begin to change your mind. You'll begin to think it's really enjoyable."

He of 1915 smiled cynically.

"Further, remember what Field-Marshal Lord French says on night operations: 'The darker the night, the fiercer the weather, the better the exercise'; and again bethink yourself on what General Jenkins in his recent lecture said, 'There is no more exhilarating experience in life than that of advancing rapidly under heavy fire.'"

"Oh, Bolsheviks to you!" said the 1915 warrior.

No. 2 smiled. "Why did you come out again?" he queried.

"Oh, I don't know. Had it in my bones, I suppose, and got fed up with staying at home."

"That's it, my friend," said No. 2. "The offensive spirit beginning to develop. Just talk to Freddy again, and you'll feel thirsting for blood in good time for the push."

"And I don't think!" said 1915. "If I'm just in time for the push, that means I'll be home again in about a month or so."

"You're far too optimistic."

"Seriously," said 1915, "how long are we to be here getting fattened?"

"Nobody knows. May be a month, perhaps only a fortnight."

"I see. The usual state of uncertainty prior to the desperate encounter, and the disenbowelling of the Huns."

"That's it, old bird, pree-cisely."

Whilst the subalterns were chatting and the short-heat races were being run, another scene was proceeding near the entrance gate.

A second general had entered. He was mounted on a particularly ill-favoured mule, and attired in a cocked hat and combination of attire, bearing a weird resem-

blance to the classic war costume of the great Napoleon. The top-boots were there, also white breeches, and the mule was of a piebald colour, probably suggested by the white charger. The general's staff, three in number, all profusely red-betabbed, attended on foot.

This general solemnly advanced to the centre of the course, dismounted, and handed his charger to an orderly.

General Halgrave watched the proceedings with amused interest.

The Napoleon general was one of the divisional jesters, with his assistants. He proceeded with much solemnity to inspect a guard.

Halgrave advanced to listen.

The jester general gazed earnestly and with excessive pomposity at the guard. He adjusted one man's glengarry by a fiftieth fraction of an inch, and proceeded to mimic the language of generals. As he adjusted the glengarry, he said, "Remember the rule, my man, one inch above the right eye. . . . That looks much better now." The jester general surveyed the unaltered glengarry with profound and grotesque approval.

He proceeded to the next man. He addressed him in a question. "How long have you been in France?"

"Six months, sir."

"Ah, well, never mind, my man. Don't be down-hearted about it. You may see many years of fighting yet."

To the next man he said, "Are you an old soldier?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you serve before this?"

"Two months in the boys' brigade, sir."

The jester general fainted in the arms of his staff at this answer, but shortly after recovered sufficiently to ride round the course, saluting profusely as he went.

The brigade staff who had thought to enliven the proceedings, had been at one time rather anxious as to the effect of some of the jester's remarks on the divisional general, but were relieved to find that he was highly amused.

In fact, everything appeared to please him that day.

He was vastly pleased to see the "Tossing the caber" won by M'Cheyne. At the dancing of the Highland fling and sword-dance, he said he felt as if he was renewing his youth. He felt no longer an old man and grizzled general, but a young pip-squeak again trying to do the old general in the eye every time.

He talked to the brigadier. "The fun we had when I was a young sub. Gad, I look back to it with pleasure still. One mustn't tell these young cubs too much, but the way we used to fool the inspecting generals in order to make them think our barrack-rooms or our men were better than anybody else's—by Jove, it was fun. . . . There's precious few of them can do me now, and that's why—I remember too well. . . ."

He sighed. "Ah, well, we must keep our minds on serious things. But upon my word, I feel quite refreshed by this day, meeting these old soldiers, and finding such an excellent spirit about."

Full of activity, he moved off to view the platoon attack competition, in which he took a particular interest.

Model platoons were to fire ten rounds rapid, advance, fire again, divide into sectional rushes, cross a hedge, pass over some trenches, make their way across a river as best they could, and finally fire again, and charge an enemy stronghold.

It was a sporting bit of work, and no mean test, but the specially trained platoons did it well, and no man failed to cross the water.

The general made a few mild criticisms, but turned away well content. He believed in his soldiers and they believed in him.

He met Captain Hazlitt, and left him impressed too with his general's buoyancy.

He talked to Travers about it. "By Jove, he's wonderful. He and General Drakelin are just the same type, and he's in great spirits to-day. Positively boiling over against the Hun."

"Yes, he's great," said Travers.

"Our division has always been lucky in its generals."

At the close of the day the general presented the prizes to the winners.

When M'Cheyne came up the general said, "I just want to say how delighted I am to see Sergeant M'Cheyne coming up here to-day. He and I have been soldiering now for somewhere about thirty years, and we're still fighting on, and going to fight on to a finish. As a man of mighty physique, as a splendid representative of Highland men, I'm sure that every man in the brigade is proud of him. But I want to say this more, that we ought to be proud of him too, because he has, in the best sense of the words, given his life to the service of God and his country. No one can do better than that."

In closing the presentation the general said, "I have been particularly pleased to-day to see the magnificent spirit which prevails in this brigade, and to see the splendid way in which every event has been competed for. That healthy spirit of competition in sport is the life of our army, and when one comes down here, it is like coming to refreshing air. Here are no doubts of victory, and no doubters, and that is the right spirit.

"I want to say now, because it may be I will not

have the opportunity of speaking to you again as a brigade, that when we go into battle, and it may be soon enough, we shall certainly have a great opportunity. I wish every man to remember, when the time comes, that he is one of the men called on by God to avenge the hellish and abominable deeds of cruelty, cowardice, and brutality which have been proved time and again to have been committed by those who have shown themselves to be the basest and most treacherous of foes. Remember that, I say, and let it steel your hearts against weakness.

"March on, fight on, carry your brigade and division to victory, as I know you will, and you will have earned my gratitude. But more, you will have earned the gratitude of millions all over the world who are looking to you and those like you as their only hope of freedom, justice, and deliverance."

When the general had finished, there was silence for a moment. Then a voice from the audience shouted, "Three cheers for the General." In an instant the scene had changed into one of raging enthusiasm.

The general was visibly affected, for he really loved his men. He drove away in his car with his hand at a constant salute.

"Good old Halgrave," said one.

"One of the best," echoed another.

The men were no less content. "The best general I've ever kenned."

"Aye, there ain't many like him. He cares about what happens to us."

Remarks like these could be heard on many sides.

After the general had gone, the pipers formed up and played their battalions back to billets. So came to an end one day's tournament amid the great war.

In the evening the divisional pierrot troupe arrived, sent by special order of the general, and played to a crowded house. The audience laughed and sang and cheered. To see them there, one might have supposed they were spending a summer holiday evening instead of preparing to go into battle.

The spirit of the troops was excellent.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMING OF THE MEN.

THE day following the sports the 971st Brigade set to work in deadly earnest with the definite preparations for the push. Such preparations are curious in their variety and type. People seeing war through romance or from history are apt to think of mighty actions, martial ardour, heroic soldiers, &c., but the people engaged in the work of preparation are for the most part occupied with a minute attention to detail which is harassing and provocative of temper.

A continual stream of chits pours from division to brigade, from brigade to battalion, and from the battalion adjutant to company commanders, platoon commanders, section commanders, and others *ad nauseam* on all possible subjects under the sun. Nothing is too remarkable for some official somewhere to unearth.

An average day in Captain Hazlitt's life ran easily to the following troubles *via* the adjutant:—

“Please render to orderly-room a certificate by 2 P.M. that all small box respirators have been inspected and found correct.”

Comparatively easy to dispose of. Hold the inspection and render, “Certified that all box respirators have been inspected and found correct.”

At least comparatively easy to dispose of when they

are correct, but there always exist those six men who have been in hospital, or been at an instructional course, or on leave, or who have just discovered a "wee hole" in their respirators which the imminent prospect of asphyxiation by gas enables them suddenly to detect. They are like unto the five virgins of Scripture who did not keep their lamps burning—with this difference, that the five suffered, but the benevolence of the British Army will not permit the six with the dubious explanations to be gassed. But they cause trouble at the last minute.

Cursing quartermaster-sergeants swear that at last inspection every man was complete, and the last inspection was held just two days ago, sir. "One can never tell what these men'll do, sir. It's ma opeenion they use these respirators for pincushions or sleeping pillows, because they're always developing trouble."

The gas N.C.O. solemnly assents to this dire conclusion, and the convicted six stand with sublime rectitude, holding their "gaspirators" in their hands in appealing silence.

Having disposed of the six, and a return having been made to orderly-room, the simple mind might conclude the matter to be disposed of. Not at all. Some statistical fiend somewhere has totalled up the strength of the battalion and compared the number with the total number of gaspirators issued—two short.

Orderly-room bowl again. "Please render to orderly-room by 3 P.M. to-day a statement of the total strength of the company, and a return of the number of small box respirators issued to the company."

The simple again might suppose that the two numbers should agree. Not so in war. It may or may not be, for reasons which are utterly elusive. A hardy sergeant-major with the courage of his convictions may

dispose of the return with ease, but a cautious fellow counts heads and gaspirators again before he presents a certificate for signature.

Men have been known to be court-martialled for undesirable "gaspirators," a fact which enjoins care.

The gaspirators inquiry is followed rapidly by the "identity disc" research, in turn closely pursued by a desire for knowledge as to the state of men of the new draft. Have they or have they not had sufficient practice in the throwing of live bombs? or alternatively, "Please certify that all men of the company have been exercised in the shell-hole to shell-hole practice."

About a dozen other chits having arrived, and the company commander being by this time in the state of wishing to heaven the push was on and all this blasted chit-warfare finished and done with, his methods are apt to grow ever simpler. Aided by the sergeant-major progress may be made. He inquires desperately—

"Sergeant-major, have all the company been exercised in the shell-hole to shell-hole advance?"

"Well, sir, there's no shell-holed ground about here to do it on, but they've certainly been told about it, and the laddies ken fine what to do."

"Well, then, we've complied with the thing as far as possible."

"Yes, sir."

"We've carried it out in spirit if not actually in mud-holes."

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I'll sign a certificate." He signs, and mutters reflectively as he does so: "Doesn't matter a d—n anyhow; all these special stunts are nah-poo when the real thing comes along."

"Quite, sir."

"I've never seen an action where the men didn't jolly

well take advantage of the shell-holes if they got the chance."

"Nor I either, sir."

As the sergeant-major is a man of many actions, the company commander's conscience is salved.

But these specimens are merely a trifling instalment of the inquiries which a really efficient system of inquiry can evolve. Hair-cutting, field-dressings, socks, feet, boots, bombs, iron rations, all these things have to do with battles, and have to be certified about some time or other.

These things appertain chiefly to the infantry. But they are not the only people who certify. The squadron leaders are just as busy certifying as any company commanders, and the range of their certificates is even greater, for horses, saddlery, and all kinds of odds and ends are open to the grand certificate system.

But as well as the infantry and the cavalry, there is the artillery certifying about guns, and the cavalry of the air certifying about aeroplanes and all sorts of details.

It is wonderful.

Prior to a great push, thousands of men are engaged in certifying, certifying, and the balls of inquiry and certification stream backwards and forwards through countless channels from divisional offices back to humble company bunks, and upwards therefrom again.

Curious, is it not? Romance tales and histories of great wars of the past say little about these details, but surely it cannot be possible that Richard Cœur de Leon went into battle without a certificate that the jerkins of his archers were correct, and that the bow-strings had been inspected by a phalanx commander.

Whatever the facts of these past days may be, certain it is that present-day commanders often have a "chitty" life prior to a push.

Let it not be thought, however, that these chits refer merely to externals. By no means. "Please render a certificate by 4 P.M. that the 'Instructions Cannon Fodder 986' have been read and explained to the men by the platoon commanders."

That chit clearly relates to the inner state of the soldier. He is not to go into battle merely as cannon fodder; he is to go in fully comprehending the idea of battle, that is, always assuming that his platoon commander has a brain wave sufficient to enable him to understand the idea, and thereafter to explain it.

Company commanders in certifying these things can but hope for the best. Sometimes Army Instructions are not intelligible even to themselves, but one can with perfect candour certify that some one else has achieved the impossible.

Amid all the certifying, of course, the actual field-work of training is going on from day to day and night to night. Thousands of infantry are marching and advancing and charging. Simulated artillery barrages are being practised, cavalry are swooping around, aeroplanes are whirling above the infantry practising their contact work, tanks roll into view, and signallers, runners, motorists, bombers, machine-gunners, and all manner of war characters are continually operating, each rehearsing their own part in the great struggle.

The greater the foresight of the staff, the greater and more adequate is the preparation which can be made.

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The days of preparation passed swiftly for the Gram-pian Division, and at last the word went forth, "MOVE."

To every brigade of the division went out a similar order: "The ——— Brigade will move on 18th inst. to camp in the Goedaerestael area."

The 18th was a great day of movement. The number

of camps available for the great masses of men was limited, and accordingly a camp had to be vacated almost contemporaneously with the entrance of new-comers, and on account of the limited time and the limits of road space the pressure was great.

One square mile of country will only hold a certain number of men from the military point of view, and when hundreds of thousands of men are moving and have to be fed and horses watered, the difficulties of great concentrations become apparent. Further, the movement was to be as far as possible concealed.

At 1 A.M. in the morning the Gareloch battalion of the 971st Brigade paraded in pitch darkness. One man could scarcely see another's face. Sergeants called the rolls of their men and their voices sounded strange in the darkness.

Company commanders rode up, peering in the darkness, and almost rode down their own men because they could not see.

In the darkness of the night platoon commanders went round the men's vacated billets with flash-lamps and inspected to see that places had been left clean.

Afterwards they reported, and the battalion were free to march off with a clear record left behind.

The voices sounded ghostly in the blackness. "All correct, sergeant-major?"

"All correct, sir."

Then the order rang out sharply.

"Company will advance in fours. . . . Quick march."

Despite the darkness the pipes skirled and the companies marched off in extreme cold, not knowing whither they were going, but fully aware that they were making for the great push.

The transport had gone ahead of the battalion, but the company cooks harnessed to mules came last.

They passed out into the roadway and the shadow of the trees. After a time the pipes stopped playing and men were marching at ease, but nevertheless they spoke little.

There was an atmosphere of subdued tension about this 1 A.M. move. There was a feeling that things were going to happen again.

On occasions like these—chilly one o'clock in the morning occasions—things are not realised at their brightest. Everybody feels a desire for breakfast long before the time, and men stumble on irregular roads and grouse *sotto voce*.

As the Garelochs moved on, they could hear on another road to their left the rattle of artillery and the occasional shouting of voices. Ahead of them was another battalion of the brigade, and coming behind them about an hour later was a third battalion.

The constant rattling of the artillery limbers sounded vivid in the darkness. When it suddenly ceased quietness seemed strange, and they could hear voices talking which explained the halt. They knew nothing of the artillery.

Apparently one of the drivers was talking to a fellow-driver. "They told us to take the first turning on the right and the third on the left. We've done that now, but we don't seem to be coming to anything. Expect we've lost the — road."

"Don't think this is a road. It's only a lane."

"Then we'd better go back."

"I dunno. We don't want to stay here the whole — night."

"There's some infantry on the road on the right. Let's shout to them."

"Expect they're on the road we should be on."

"Like enough. Let's shout to them anyhow."

"Aye. . . . Hi there. . . . Is that the road to Allyban?"

"Aye."

"Can we get across?"

"Naw. Ye'll need to go back."

The sound of terrific language floated across to the infantry, and in the darkness they smiled grimly. They thought little about it, but these are the sort of things which upset concentrations.

The infantry stodged on, while there were evident sounds of jolting limbers and backing of horses. Several half-frozen drivers were also exercising their throats.

At 2.30 A.M. the Gareloch battalion arrived at the station. They found the transport already loading up on the trucks of a very long train.

The men filed into the carriages, and the officers climbed in by the window into first-class carriages, for the doors of which no key could be found. (The application of foreign rolling-stock to French railways has its own results.)

Before the train moved off tea was handed round, drawn from the cookers, and officers and men put down something to stave off the cold. Thousands of men at different parts of the country and line were doing the same thing.

After tea the train puffed out slowly and continued to jolt and jar across France at a slow rate for hours until the dawn began to break. As the train moved, weary men lay about in the trucks and officers yawned wearily, endeavouring to stretch their legs. As the dawn broke they gazed out with yawning mouths at the country through which they were passing. The train jolted on slowly, and the more energetic calculated how long they might be before they reached their destination.

They gazed casually at the sights that appeared from time to time, such as German prisoners working as laundry-men, "brass hats" in cars, peasant women in the fields, an occasional pretty girl at a village window, market gardens among canals, or Indian cavalry.

They talked little except to congratulate each other on the possession of chocolates, or smoking material, or other means of whiling away the tedium of the journey. Of the push they said little or nothing. They wondered what sort of place "Goedaerestael" was, and nicknamed it for comfort in use and as a commentary on their final purpose, "God help us all."

The train jogged on interminably. They had breakfast (proper) about 7 A.M. on bread and bully and tea. They had lunch at 1 P.M. on the same sustaining food. And they had afternoon tea on tea and bully and bread, but still the train jogged on.

About four o'clock it stopped near a large town. There appeared no reason for stopping. Then a whisper spread along the train, "Bombs."

When they heard that they remarked, "We must be getting nearer now."

A few minutes later and they saw in the distance the enemy planes. There followed at intervals the distant sound of two heavy explosions, then silence.

After a time the train jogged on.

"Not got the railway anyhow," said the adjutant.

"No. Would need pretty shooting to do that from the height at which they were firing," said the colonel.

They relapsed into silence again.

Two of the subalterns started to talk about the air warfare.

"They're some planes these bombing machines that the Huns are trotting out now."

"Yes, but it's the men that count. Our men have got more guts than theirs."

"Not so sure. Given an equally good machine, I've seen them put up a healthy fight. The Hun airman's the best of their crowd."

"Daresay. But give our men an equal machine and I

know where I'd put my money every time. . . . Our men fight them with inferior machines. The Hun runs every time he's not aboard a winner."

"Sound judge, too."

"Maybe. But whether our men are right or not it shows they have the guts."

The argument ended abruptly with the arrival of the train at a small station.

The voice of the regimental sergeant-major was heard, "Here we are, God help us all! . . . Yes, sir. This is the place."

Six o'clock, and it was almost dark again and there proved to be several miles to march.

Weary men invested themselves with their equipment and formed up. Transport mules plunged and kicked on to the platform. Transport and cookers were harnessed up and the battalion moved out of the station. The whole debarkation was done in half an hour, and the train puffed off to carry on the work of the concentration elsewhere. The next train with the next battalion steamed in. More men disembarked. Another train steamed in. So on the work on the railway continued. The lines these days were one continuous roll of trains, rolling backwards and forwards as the directors of the concentration desired. And amid all these special trains the supply and ordinary trains were running as usual.

The companies of the Gareloch battalion having entered the war area, marched with several hundred yards between companies. Those bombs probably would not fall on them, but they might. Through the gathering darkness they marched on in weary silence. At 8 P.M. the first company entered their night camp. The cookers came on again and gave the light of their fires. The men's dinners had been cooking on the road as they marched up, and so they got their dinners and went to

bed in tents, sleeping soundly on their waterproof sheets. Many other battalions were doing just the same things.

In the morning they woke at five, and were ready to march at half-past seven. The pipes played, and they tramped forward to the main road. Then it was, in the brightening light, that they realised first the greatness of the event.

As they approached the road, they did so along a gentle slope; but it was sufficient to enable them to see a number of the roads of the district, and wherever they looked those roads were packed. Men and horses and guns were passing along the roads in thousands—marching, marching continually. The stream seemed never-ending.

It almost seemed as if there could be no place for them; but the traffic control made a way, and the battalion filed in to swell the ever-growing throng.

Company by company they joined the march, with the transport last of all.

When they started the march to the next camp, there was only a few hundred yards between companies, but when they ended the march——

When they entered the road, A Company was leading, and, as it chanced, got across the first cross-roads without delay. When B Company, some hundred yards behind, reached the cross-roads, a stream of traffic ran in front of them from both sides, and the traffic control policeman could not let them through. By the time he had effected a halt of the traffic on the road-crossing, A Company had gained about three hundred yards on B Company, and also on C and D Companies, because they had not been able to move at all. There were numerous cross-roads to pass, and by the time A Company had passed them all, D

Company was only at the fourth cross-road, and the transport and the cookers were toiling behind.

A Company got into camp about two hours later than expected, but also one hour sooner than B, and two or three hours sooner than the rest. Result—wearry men and no food for hours, because the cookers were last. The waiting men drank their chlorinated water out of their bottles, and waited until the still wearier companies arrived.

The staff had calculated all these things, and the times to be allowed for each brigade and division to complete its concentration, but the enormous pressure on space created delay. These are the things that upset concentrations and bring disaster to battles.

As regards the 971st Brigade, sufficient allowance had been made for the delay which took place, but the men received less rest than had been anticipated.

This was reported in a memorandum on the concentration.

An inquiry on the subject tended to show that the delay which occurred, and which affected the whole movement, arose partly out of circumstances beyond the control of any one—such as an inevitable breakdown on one road, created by a casual shell—but also by the unsatisfactory marching of two divisions.

It appeared that men of these divisions had straggled to a considerable extent, and the divisions had occupied miles more of road space than they should have done, with unfortunate results for other combinations. One of the divisions had also been late in starting, and should have been clear of certain roads, and thereby prevented their becoming blocked.

The men of the Gareloch battalion, of course, knew nothing about all that. They only realised that it was part of their job to put up with inconveniences.

In the camp which they had reached, they found themselves part of a far greater camp of dun-coloured tents and bivouacs, hidden as far as possible by trees. There were also crowds of men billeted in adjacent houses and huts.

When Captain Hazlitt gazed around, he echoed many thoughts when he murmured—

“It’s going to be some push.”

“Yes; we’re for it this time all right,” said Travers.

Before they had got well settled into the camp, the billeting officer of the battalion which was to succeed them had arrived to see the camp and allot billets for the in-comers.

In that way divisions and brigades and battalions swept forward from camp to camp, resting a night, and then onward, another move toward the battle area. If a vast aeroplane photograph of fifty square miles could have been taken all at once, and at the proper moment, it would have shown a picture of running trains and marching men ever streaming forward in one direction—that stream only being checked in places by the counter-stream proceeding in the opposite direction, in the endeavour to make room for the on-comers.

CHAPTER XV.

IMPEDIMENTA.

IF infantry had been the only troops on the roads, things might have been comparatively simple; but that would have been too easy.

An endless stream of motor-lorries, motor-buses, staff cars, waggons, and limbers rattled and jolted in the mud, sliding dangerously on the edge of the *pavé*, and sometimes actually slipping into the mud beside the *pavé* and hanging there, swaying between continuance of their journey and total downfall.

Cavalry, too, mingled in the general struggle. They trotted forward in places when opportunity occurred, but for the most part were held bound to a walk by the narrowness of the road and the crush of traffic.

In a way the scene reminded of a great race, with thronging vehicles and crowds, with the violent difference that the race crowd is gay and disappears rapidly, while the war movement is grim and dead slow.

Weary troopers of the 80th Hussars mounted and dismounted periodically, owing to prolonged and enforced waits. Mr Jarvis, in command for the time of a squadron, wearily grunted out, "Prepare to dismount—dismount!" for there was no use exhausting the horses more than necessary.

"Lead on!" and the troopers would stodge it on foot for a while. Unlike the infantry, however, a considerable part of their burden of war apparatus was on their horses' backs, attached to their saddles.

From time to time Mr Jarvis sighed as he gazed on the "circus" in front and around him, and muttered to himself, "What a hope!"—a phrase he generally employed when things looked cheerless.

If he had only had the squadron with him he would have trusted to luck and fox-hunted across the country anyhow; but that scheme had to be abandoned, as the transport was also with him, and he had orders not to proceed without it.

As they proceeded up the road the cavalry were subject to comment. Their presence was unusual.

Jarvis—a slim officer, rather of the 'Beaucaire' type—met one or two acquaintances.

"Hello, Jarvis! what are *you* doing here?"

"Going into action, I believe, old thing; but you probably know more about it than I do."

"Haven't heard a word."

"Oh, well, I haven't either. But rather understand, we may be wanted, and we're getting there, as you see, by degrees."

"By Jove, things looking up! Eh, what! when the cavalry are wanted."

"Oh yes; we'll put it across them all right."

This last remark made in the airy manner for which Jarvis was noted. He was a popular officer.

"With your sharp swords, I suppose!" said the acquaintance satirically.

"Exactly," said Jarvis, unruffled. "We've had them all taken to the blacksmith's to be specially tempered."

The acquaintance gulped and grinned. "Cheery-o,

old bird!" he said, as he moved off. "You'll let me know how many you have sabred, won't you, when you come down?" Apparently he was cynical about the employment of cavalry in the great trench war.

"It'll be a pleasure to mention it," said Jarvis. "Who'd have thought of meeting old Coke with that guy outfit?" he muttered as he waited.

Coke's outfit consisted of a company of very dirty soldiers coming down from the trenches. They might be said to be camouflaged in mud and grime.

As they passed, the mud-bespattered and weary infantry gazed on the cavalry with eager eyes. The allurements of mounted warfare presented themselves to their minds as never before. Had they had to commence soldiering again, after seeing and feeling as they did then, perhaps they would have enlisted in the cavalry.

"Man, it would be fine to get a seat on one o' thae beasts!" said one.

"Aye." The second speaker was actually so exhausted that he felt no desire to utter another word, but simply gazed on the horses with weary solemnity.

No. 1 gazed on the equipment and saddles.

"Put all yer duds on the horse's back, and just have to sit perched up there!"

"Aye."

Another speaker commenced talking to the cavalry.

"Hey, Bill, are ye goin' up to fight now?"

Apparently the cavalry discerned a certain reflection in the inquiry.

"We've been up in the trenches just as often as you."

"Aw, come, now! Ye've been up sometimes, but no just as often as we."

The cavalryman stared. So did the infantry.

"Have you got a fag?"

The cavalry bore no ill-will, and produced the needful.

The infantry received the order to move first, and got started, slowly tramping off. As they went, the infantryman shouted "Good-bye, and good luck!" It was the shout of the comradeship of war rising above all sectional differences.

"Good-bye, foot-slogger!" said the cavalryman. The term was not objected to. It was spoken rather as sympathetic to the weary infantry, and that was understood.

"Prepare to mount—mount!"

Mr Jarvis had seen an opening, and prepared to take advantage of it. His troopers raised themselves out of the mud into the saddle, and the cavalcade trotted steadily forward until the next check.

They passed some other infantry on their flank, who cursed the cavalry for splashing them with mud. A little mud more or less, of course, scarcely mattered, but their feelings were hurt more than their tunics.

In a great concentration the unhappy infantry, as in many other things, bear the brunt of the struggle.

Another quarter of an hour of marching was followed by the inevitable check, with the phlegmatic motor-men sitting silently smoking, or chewing, or indulging in some other facial manœuvre, the transport and cavalry horses pawing or fidgeting, and the men above them staring around looking "fed-up," to use their own term.

What the future held for them they did not consider. War is a great teacher of the maxim, "Sufficient for the moment is the evil, grime, dust, and misery thereof." An increased allotment of these items will no doubt be endured when the time comes.

At this halt the proceedings were enlivened by an

air performance. Suddenly from the front a number of specks became visible in the sky. They drew nearer and were clearly seen as mighty bombing-planes. With their approach the anti-aircraft barrage started, and the sky was in a few moments dotted with white and black puffs of smoke. The barrage was effective, and enveloped the enemy planes in a complete circle of bursting shell.

Apparently the planes had enough, for they whirled inside the barrage and went home, but before they did so they left behind their messages, which were heard by the men waiting on the road in the dull booms of crashing bombs.

The fall of the bombs enlivened the cavalry for a moment. The men noted with satisfaction that the barrage had been effective.

"They ain't a-wyted long," said a Cockney, referring to the departing planes.

"Nah, but they dropped their little testimonials all right."

"Yus," said another. "They must ha' got somethin' or somebody, with everybody blocked in the roads, and all these camps about."

"Begob, they must!"

Farther forward, in a low shelter covered with corrugated iron, about three feet deep of sandbags and a layer of stones, Private Henry Parker gazed out from the bottom of the doorway with scaredom in his eyes.

He was oppressed by a terrible thought. He heard the drone of the great engines of the planes of the enemy squadron, and he heard the bombs coming down with the furious railway-train rush, then crash with earth-shaking roar, only five hundred yards away.

He was desperately uncertain whether he should stay

where he was or come out into the open. Above him was three feet deep of sandbags,—was that protection against bombs? He was not sure; he feared not; yet obviously that was the idea with which the three feet deep had been put there.

The thing which troubled him most was the contents of the shelter in which he was placed. It was filled with hundreds of hand-bombs. He was one of a forward party preparing bombs for the great attack. Until a few moments before he had been peacefully putting detonators into the bombs without thought of evil. But now—if one of these aeroplane bombs from above were to drop on top of the shelter——.

To the ordinary mind it might seem that to be killed by one bomb is as bad as to be killed by hundreds. But the mind of Henry Parker was not subtle. He made no distinctions, and it was a terrible thought to him that he might be blown up heavenwards by the very bombs he had been detonating. The patter of falling anti-aircraft shrapnel in the neighbourhood made the possibility even more vivid.

When the second bomb which burst in his vicinity dropped in a field a few hundred yards away and the earth opened, and mules which had been standing picketed there simply vanished away, the eyes of Henry Parker stared out of his head in consternation.

He determined to remain in his shelter, and if need be die with the bombs of his own detonation.

A quarter of an hour after the raid had passed he had resumed with redoubled energy the task of filling detonators into the small Mills hand-bombs.

He had little imagination. He was accustomed to the task, and never stopped to think that a slip with one of the detonators he was handling might equally well result in his being blown up.

He thought only of manufacturing missiles with which some one (not himself) would slay the enemy who had sent the droppers of the missiles that had fallen not so very far from himself.

His works remind strongly of the pleasant rhyme—

“ Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean,
And the pleasant land.”

All alone there he was working his small though deadly contributions to General Drakelin's push.

All around him were the thronging scenes, the tumult and stress of war, but he worked like an old lady at her knitting, just fitting those detonators in. A very essential though apparently small part in the great scheme.

Cigarette Ching Ching of yellow skin, but perhaps kindred soul, was doing his minor part too by hurling wheelbarrows of rubble only a few miles away from the location of Henry Parker. Ching Ching possessed no oriental stoicism whatever. He cordially loathed bombs, and when they arrived went to earth, without instruction, by natural instinct. Perhaps these two war workers had but one thought—how to move to some happier sphere when bombing planes arrived—but the stern discipline of war had caught them in its grasp and prevented their departure.

One more day scene culled from unceasing activity behind that front, for all these things and thousands of others are proceeding at the same moment.

William Johnston, a small man, was a joiner to trade, and so fell into the job of the construction of the battle headquarters of a brigade. He was engaged

twenty yards below the surface in propping up with wood the stairway leading to the dug-out.

Working where he was, the noises of battle were dulled by the covering earth, and he worked without anxiety. Twenty feet of earth was a reasonable and solid piece of cover, and he was justified in thinking so.

But fate dealt otherwise, and chose the well-protected William in preference to the ill-defended Henry.

A powerful shell with a delay-action fuse buried its nose in the earth close to William Johnston, and bursting laterally removed him and part of his work.

When a party came along a short time afterwards they found no trace of him.

The party argued whether to continue building the headquarters there or whether to commence farther along.

Shortness of time, combined with a fallacious argument, led to continuation in the same place.

The work left by the shell could be utilised, which saved time. The argument was, "that no two shells ever fall in the same place," which pleasing theory was believed to protect all brigadiers and other future occupants even better than mere earth-works.

As a gunnery principle founded on the variability of fire from any particular gun due to the conditions affecting fire, the statement may be roughly true; as a general maxim of universal application it is obviously untrue. Thousands of shells have fallen in the same place in the present war.

Anyhow, the rebuilding of the dug-out in the same place explains how the brigadier came subsequently to pick up William Johnston's identity disc on the floor.

The brigadier was a thoughtful man and handed the

disc to an orderly, who handed it to another orderly, and it went on passing from hand to hand till it reached the adjutant of William Johnston's battalion, who had it tied up with William Johnston's effects prior to their being sent home.

All of which details were going on in the midst of the opening of a great battle.

The coming of the night saw the activities of the day only increased in intensity. Under cover of the night unceasing processions of men were pouring forwards to toil on all manner of tasks.

Forty men were engaged in one place in carrying up "footballs" for the heavy trench mortars, a type of ammunition so called from the fact that the projectile resembles a football. It weighs about sixty pounds.

Forty weary men, each with one of these unwieldy missiles, staggered forward through trenches ankle-deep in mud.

They leaned against the side of the trench from time to time.

As the journey proceeded, they grew ever more weary, and the N.C.O. in charge found increasing difficulty in getting them on. Sixty pounds is a very heavy weight for worn-out men, and there was no certainty how far they had to go or exactly where their destination was.

Interjections were frequent.

"Gawd! Aa canny go farther than this!" The man who spoke had stumbled over a board and lay in the trench, his football dug in the mud.

The man in front of him had been struck by the football as the other fell, and he turned savagely. ". . . can ye no watch where ye're goin'. Ye've nearly broken ma leg."

A shell burst about fifty yards away.

Nobody paid any attention to that.

The voice of the N.C.O. was heard fiercely ordering.
"Get on there, these men. Get on with it!"

"Gawd, I'm done!"

"Get that d—d football out of the mud and come on!"

The man started to pull and heave the "football" out, but his hands gripped feebly and the thing was badly stuck. The N.C.O. sprang into the trench and started to haul. A moment later and the "football" was heaved up again on the man's shoulder.

"Now look where you're going, and get on!"

The man stumbled on with the remainder of the forty. The sergeant went forward again.

The whole thing was happening under shell fire and lurid light, but the men were so worn-out with carrying that they paid little attention to other things.

At the same time many eighteen-pounder guns were coming up the roads and slowly getting into position. The commanders of gun sections were struggling to get their guns forward without loss, but the task was impossible. Intermittent fire burst frequently on the roads and tracks and on the whole area behind the front line, and the target was too great to permit all to escape.

Here and there a shell crashed right on a team, and gun and horses were left sunk in the shell-hole or scattered useless around. The guns of other batteries gave a casual assistance, or passed on as best they could. For the most part they passed on, for their orders were to get into position, not to delay succouring those that fell out. The nearer the line, the more desperate the work, the less possibility of delay. Suc-

cour of another team was, if given, in most cases merely incidental to the work of enabling the next team to get forward.

For those that got forward the difficulties grew ever greater. Leaving the road and crossing the open, the ground was only a question of degree. The steering of the teams between huge craters left by shells and over naturally boggy ground, more sodden by rain, became a matter of desperate endeavour.

The drivers dismounted from their horses, whose legs were knee-deep in mud, and themselves plunged into the morass. They pulled and coaxed and cursed. Gunners strove with the wheels, and men walked ahead if possible to find tracks which might enable the guns to get up.

With every gun that got through the ground became more unreliable, and the task of the rear guns literally desperate. Words cannot treat of the immensity of the efforts that were made.

Peter Binner, the unfortunate, toiled heroically with his horses standing up to their bodies in mud. The wheels of the guns were up to the axles. Having got into that position in the darkness, every effort appeared only to make matters worse. In his determination to get forward he had sought out a new track for himself, and had ended only in being more hopelessly morassed than ever.

In the lurid half-light existing about a thousand yards behind the line, resulting from the effect of flares going up in front which cast a part of their light forward, from the natural light, and from the atmosphere of smoke and dust, Peter Binner stood at the head of his team, whip in hand and up to the thighs in mud.

He was at his wits' end, and he was thinking. The

imminence of the shells that were falling affected him to the extent of making him desire greatly to get out of that place, even if his orders had not also commanded it.

To struggle on seemed to be only to get more involved. To go back, little better. To take out the team——

Peter Binner had all his difficulties solved, for a shell came and knocked both himself and all his horses out. The gun remained in the mud, canted heavily to the side, but it was uninjured, and the battery undertook the work of salving it in the early morning.

The section commander wrote home to Peter's mother to say that Driver Peter Binner had been a very gallant soldier, and had died at his post while engaged on the difficult task of bringing up his gun.

A party of machine-gunners coming up the same night were more lucky than Binner. They had also more time for consideration, and their commander, before going into the open, studied carefully the belts of fire where the enemy shells were falling.

The machine-gun officer had in his pocket a chart showing the areas over which the enemy fire was usually flung.

With the assistance of the chart and his own observation, the machine-gun party darted forward from point to point. Their greater mobility, of course, gave them an advantage over the guns.

The machine-gunners got into position without loss.

An innumerable host of other activities rolled on continuous.

It is worth while to figure in imagination for a moment that extraordinary scene.

Not a battle, merely the preparation for a battle.

Think of the whole weird scene carrying on in that extraordinary mixture of light in front, often brilliant and all-revealing, farther back, dimmer and more ghostly, farther back still, shadowing off into the complete gloom of night. The men in front were seeing one another often as if it were daylight. The sentries in camps behind saw nothing but the distant star-shell—a flicker showing for a few moments, then fluttering down into darkness till the next one.

But the clearness of the light is complicated by smoke and dust, and the whole atmosphere is charged with the sulphury, chlorinated, creosoted, indescribable and oppressively intense feeling of war. There is something so tinglingly intense about it, that only the utterly worn-out soldier fails to notice it. With the weirdness of the light and atmosphere, there is constant hubbub of fighting, red stab-flashed light from guns, with accompanying roar of noise, screaming shells, deep-bursting and cracker-bursting, rattling machine-guns, sometimes in chorus, sometimes sounding fiercely clear in a moment of stillness, thudding bombs, crackling rifles, and all sorts of missiles whizzing or crashing at intervals. At very long intervals there may live for a few seconds a calm, only to be broken with startling fierceness.

But there is more than light and sound and smell. All around are the ghostly figures that lie waiting, the stray rifles, the broken guns, and all the *débris* and wreck of war, clinging in mud, or sticking bogey-like in places where there can be no removal.

And in all this area, work—incessant work. Figuring the scene from the front backwards, it surges constantly—those digging parties in front toiling over those saps and trenches; behind come the carrying parties with wood and wire and spades and ammunition and iron

rations, the feeders of the men that work in front; behind again, more diggers of all kinds building the shelters of headquarters, the emplacements of guns and trench mortars, the shelters of ammunition dumps, and a dozen other contrivances; behind again come those endless streams of guns and horses and men and machines and ammunition, whose only purpose is to get forward into the battle. They are the fighters for the battle they are entering; they may be the carriers and diggers for the next battle.

And upon all those toilers the enemy are pouring frequent streams of missiles, and men are dying, and stretcher-bearers are binding up and carrying down, but the work never stops.

No man stops because the next number dies. Carry him down, but the rest work on.

"The platoon commander will mark the spot where the man is buried, and a cross will be erected."

That is due to the glorious dead, but the living must work while there is time.

CHAPTER XVI.

EIGHT A.M.

AT six o'clock on the morning following the work described in the preceding chapter, many officers were awake early. Men could sleep while they had the chance.

Colonel Berdelin was among the early risers, and his usual phlegm was sufficiently disturbed to make him proceed straight from his bed and gaze earnestly out at the window. He opened the window and sniffed the air, also held his hand out, palm uppermost, for a few seconds.

It was dry—almost. But the heavens were clouded, and the sensation which Colonel Berdelin had was that it looked like rain. He turned away from the window and proceeded to dress. Immediately after, he had breakfast and then went to his room.

He found General Drakelin already there. The general looked worn and did not even say "good-morning" as he usually did.

"Well?" he queried.

"Weather?" said Berdelin.

"Yes. What do you think?"

"The reports are favourable enough, but I don't like the look of the sky."

"No more do I."

They stared at each other in silence. Each was thinking of the same thing.

"Even now we could stop . . . a while?"

"Yes."

"But you don't think we should?"

"No. The preparations are too far advanced."

"Everything's ready?"

"Well, as ready as we'll ever be. There are always those few details that dead men have left undone."

As he spoke Colonel Berdelin's voice sounded stern, and the suggestion a casual listener might have gathered was, that his view was that they shouldn't have died, or that if they did, they should have come back from the dead to complete.

"Well, it's not actually raining yet," said the general. But there was a note of disappointment in his voice.

"No. But apart from all that, the reports on enemy movements and on their artillery fire show that they're waking up. If they get time to guess the main point of attack, we're done as regards the surprise, and that's half the initial advantage gone."

"Quite," said the general. "Quite," he muttered again abstractedly. For the first time in his recollection, Colonel Berdelin noticed that the general looked worn, and observed him tighten and loosen his hands with a nervous movement.

The general represented highly-strung nervous force, initiative, and a certain genius for war, but his constitution was not too strong. Colonel Berdelin had a frame and a constitution apparently of iron, and the most tremendous event showed little in effect upon him. Of course, he was not really the bearer of the mighty burden of those hundreds of thousands that were in an hour's time to open the battle.

General Drakelin walked to the window and gazed

out for almost a minute. Weather was of tremendous importance to his operations, and he had done all that man could do to start at a favourable time, but it looked as if the event was to prove unfavourable.

He stared out of the window grimly. For a second he wondered what he had done to deserve this of heaven. Then he put the idea aside. He turned and spoke quietly.

"In God's name, let us carry on."

Colonel Berdelin rang a bell. An officer appeared, to whom he handed a written order.

The officer went out, and with him the final order.

About three-quarters of an hour afterwards a small drizzling rain began to soak silently down.

About twelve miles away, Major-General Halgrave sat before a table on which lay the corps orders issued to him, plans of the ground over which his division was to attack, and immediately in front of him the preliminary instructions issued by himself to the division.

"The Grampian Division will take part in offensive operations at an early date with the —— Brigade on the right, and the —— Brigade on the left. . . .

"The 400th Division will attack on the right flank, and the Canadian Division on the left. . . .

"Dividing lines showing divisional areas of attack are shown on attached sketch 'K.'

"The objectives and times of arrival and departure for infantry are shown on sketch 'K.'"

Through all the preliminary details the instructions ran on for a couple of typewritten pages. Headquarters, communications, aeroplanes, artillery, signals, and all the rest of the necessary information was dealt with in succession.

All that was complete. What he was now studying

were the final orders for attack, and he was waiting for the message from the corps which was dependent on the message from the army.

Fifteen minutes after General Drakelin had spoken, the message arrived.

Halgrave completed the consideration of the orders, and handed them to Major Batterby.

After he had done so, he too rose and gazed anxiously at the sky. There was not exactly the same anxiety about his thought as there had been about General Drakelin's, because the responsibility did not rest with him; but, nevertheless, the possibilities of the weather troubled him. "Our infernal luck again," he muttered.

With his mind's eye he could see those guns struggling to get forward through a country in which every shell-hole was a miniature lake, whose banks broke away at the touch of a wheel, and he could see his splendid infantry plunging wearily forward, skirting around those shell-holes, and lying half on the edge of them, half in the water, because to take complete cover in them meant being drowned, or reduced to nothingness with sodden ammunition and rifle.

Three miles from the front line "Kate" was very busy. "Kate" had moved forward to that camp on the previous day, and had made an arduous night-march to get there along roads even more crowded than before.

"Kate" was the official name for the Gareloch battalion for the purpose of battle. That was the code name issued in the preliminary instructions for the purpose of withholding information from the enemy. The companion battalion was "Kit," and they both belonged to the "Deer" Brigade and "Broom" Division.

It appeared from the preliminary instructions that

"Kate" and "Kit" battalions were to go up hand in hand as the front portion of the "Deer" Brigade, and attack along the line shown on the sketches, and above all things they were to capture Poke House and Pike Farm, two strong points in the enemy line, called by courtesy "House" and "Farm," because they had at one time been these things; but at the period in question nothing but ruined heaps of stone, fortified by various devices and concealing machine-guns.

When it came to be nearly eight o'clock, officers began to look at their watches. The news had spread that the game was to open at eight, and everybody looked at their watch with a sort of wondering interest. Everything was very quiet just then, and any change could be identified right away.

"Would it really start just at eight or not?"

The newcomers to the game waited in silent expectation. The old hands expected with silent interest, but they wondered, too, if every gun would "lash out" just on "the dot."

It puts so much more finish to the thing if at the expiry of the passing of that last second—the sixtieth second of the last minute of the seven o'clock hour—every gun goes. It shows organisation. Every watch had been synchronised and it should happen.

As the remaining seconds ebbed away, here and there officers stood with their watches in their hands and waited.

"Fifty-nine, sixty—— Hiss! Hiss! Hiss!"

From right along the line it came. Boom! Boom! Boom!"

Every one smiled in a relieved way, for organisation had triumphed.

The battle had begun with the roar of a short artillery preparation. Every gun and howitzer and trench-

mortar for miles along the line was, in its due rotation of fire, spouting furiously—not a few guns, but thousands of guns, standing almost wheel to wheel.

The gunners had entered on their great artillery marathon. Hour after hour it was to go on, each gun according to its class sending out its due share. One shell every four seconds—every ten, every twenty, whatever the allotment was—it was to go on relentlessly all day and many days. A thousand shells fired per day was to be nothing for them compared with the necessity of the work. Men were to drop out through sheer exhaustion. Others were to stick on, scarcely able to raise a shell to its place, but still those guns were to continue firing until they became molten hot.

Think of those guns as they spout hour after hour, continually doing the same things.

Récoil, opening of breeches, shutting of breeches, loading of shells, unloading, men deafened, sweating with the toil and moil of it, repeating these motions automatically, desperately, amid the incessant din—and shells are not playthings in weight. Even a little one of eighteen pounds is heavier than the dumb-bell the average muscle-man used to employ prior to the days of free-arm exercise.

Many of the gunners took their coats off before they started; some stripped to the waist, because they knew that before those guns had obliterated as much of the enemy trenches as required, and blotted out or frightened the enemy batteries, or those trench-mortars and howitzers had done with the destruction of enemy wire, they were to be so worn out that the “less-weight up” from the start the better.

By the time the marathon was ended, the bores of some of those guns were to be so worn that a shot fired to hit 3000 yards away might drop at 2700 yards.

How then could the gunners be certain that they were hitting in the right place?

War is a business of risks.

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When the artillery started to fire, every man of the enemy took to cover, and the fire proved so terrific that even look-outs were abandoned in many places. When put out, they were in many places killed.

In places, the enemy retired to great sunken caverns reinforced with concrete, which stood many shells; but in other places their shelter was scanty and their lives brief.

With the opening of the bombardment, furious activity prevailed in the German Headquarters. General von Dressler was expecting attack, and fire was being directed against his line; but at the same time, although he had not mentioned the matter, he privately thought that an attack might be directed against Bissingen's part of the line. That thought rather amused him, because he thought Von Bissingen would receive a set-back, a thing for which he (Dressler) would not be sorry, because he disliked Bissingen. Dressler thought there was no fear of the line being broken, but Bissingen would be proved a fool, unless Kreissler saved him. Good from his point of view.

Bissingen cordially reciprocated Dressler's feelings of dislike, all the more because he realised that Dressler knew more about the business of leading an army than he did. When the bombardment of both lines commenced, Bissingen sat in his quarters and fidgeted in extreme nervousness. He pestered Colonel Kreissler as to the probabilities and possibilities, but that officer merely said that everything had been done that was possible with the number of men available.

Bissingen bit his finger-nails—a bad habit which he

had—and wondered whether he should ask for further support at once, or whether he should allow time for the artillery preparation to develop. As modern battles went, it would probably last a week. In that time much could be done.

Should he wait and then ask, or should he demand help now? He knew that spare divisions were scarce, and if he asked wrongly he would be blamed. If he didn't ask and was wrong, equally he would be blamed.

Bissingen took the line of least resistance at the moment. He directed certain minor operations to be carried out and waited.

All the time as the hours went by, however, he was haunted by fears.

He looked at the map, and then tossed it aside, then looked at it again, and frowned and bit his nails. If only they did attack, and he succeeded, then Dressler would no longer be able to talk. On the other hand, if they didn't attack, he could still carry on in the quiet safe way. If they attacked and *succeeded*—

Personal ambition made him wish desperately for success whatever way it came, and that personal wish almost obscured the thought of his country's troubles. He tried to banish the thought of possible failure, but he was very nervous, and in his nervousness did nothing.

Or rather, he tried from time to time, while gazing at the plan, to pierce the veil that hid from him the enemy's thoughts, but his brain seemed unable to cope with the thing.

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While the artillery were doing their work of preparation, "Kate" battalion and the other battalions about to enter the battle were still busy certifying.

They held the last inspection prior to the battle. That spare pair of socks, rifles, ammunition, bombs,—all these came in for a last review, and at the end the grand certificate was presented—that every man was fully equipped for battle. Many thousands of men were thus certified to have girt up their loins, and to be fully girded for the fight.

In that state they paraded at seven P.M., and the order by Major-General Halgrave was read out on parade.

“Men of the Grampian Division—

“It is with feelings of the keenest pride that I have had the honour of commanding this division for nearly eight months. During that time—a time which has been filled with days of desperate encounter and nights of weary toil and battle—I can say without any qualification at all that you have never failed. Time and again you have gloriously succeeded, and you have behind you a magnificent record of service, which none can better and few can equal.

“Once again we are called on to go into battle, and this time in circumstances which are highly honourable to us. You have been chosen to go first into the battle, and I have been told that the success of the operations depends in the highest measure on the initial attack. It is for that reason you have been chosen.

“I need say no more. I believe and trust in you, and know that you will readily prefer death to dishonour. But more I believe that you will this day carry the standard of the Grampian Division on to an overwhelming victory, amid an overwhelming destruction of the enemies of mankind.

“Men of the 971st Division, this is Grampia’s day. The hopes of your country and the world are centred upon you. March on then to victory for your country, and the mighty cause we all serve.”

After reading the address, such of the company commanders as desired to do so addressed their men.

After he had read it, Captain Hazlitt merely added, "I am sure that the spirit of our general is the spirit of every man here. We believe in the cause for which we are fighting, and we will do our best."

The speeches being ended, the companies filed quietly out by platoons.

As they moved along the road, some of the men talked.

"Did ye hear what the general said, Jock?"

"Aye."

"The morn's Grampia's day."

"Aye."

"And what dae ye think o' that?"

"Oh, Aa'm aye thinking the same thing. If we've got to fecht of course we'll fecht. There wouldna be any use in doin' anythin' else. But about Grampia's day, and all that, what Aa think is, that somebody else might have a turn at doin' the Grampia days, raither than me. Aa've been doin' two and a half years o' Grampia days noo, and Aa'm wunderin' if Aa'll be gettin' a blighty maybe."

"Imphm!"

They relapsed into silence. The second speaker resumed after a few minutes' reflection. "No that the general's not a good man. He is. He's the best general ever Aa've seen. He's the only one that ever spoke tae me . . . he asked me hoo Aa got ma military medal. . . . But for aw that, it's kin' o' different for thae big bugs that sits behind, and us little fellers that goes in front."

"Aa ken."

They relapsed into final silence.

Captain Hazlitt's company was slowly threading its

way along the road in the thick darkness of a misty drizzle.

The mist was perhaps fortunate for them, because they were drawing near the final scene of action, and in combination with the night the mist formed an effective cover from view. It afforded cover of no other description, however, and the mist was frequently pierced with the sharp stab flashes of shrapnel bursting near the road.

The several platoons of the company were moving up the road, with intervals of about two hundred yards between. As far as the total numbers of the company itself were concerned, the provision against the spread of shrapnel bullets was useful enough, but as regards the preservation of life in general, the provision was useless, because the road was a seething mass of men toiling up to the firing line or struggling down.

Frequent blocks took place on the road, and men occasionally inquired about the prospect from the men coming down.

"What's it like in front?"

"Eh? Don't ask me. I've had enough."

"It's bad then?"

"Yes." The warrior who answered was in the state of having had enough for that time, and spoke no more.

The next speaker was not so rattled.

"It's worse gettin' up than it is when ye're there. If ye get through their barrage that's thrown on the road and the field half-way up, ye'll find the front line not so bad wi' shells, and there's no gas in front. But it's terrible to live with up there—nothin' but mud and water and holes. Ye needn't look for a trench, for there isn't one."

"There's no trench at all?"

"No. It's all knocked about—just holes."

As the description was finished, the mass of men on both sides of the road started to move, and the opposing streams of soldiery heaved onward with uneasy movement, clanking of equipment, and the general sound of barging forward of bodies of men.

After a time Captain Hazlitt's company left the road, and began to cross fields on a duck-board track. In places the boards were almost floating on water if there was no weight on top, and with the tramp of the men's feet there was a constant ooze and splash of water.

The men's boots were soaked over the top, and their legs and feet were plashing in water. It was tiring and uncomfortable work, and it was difficult to follow the duck-board track in the darkness.

To go off the track was to become lost, and probably to run into trouble for falling out on the march while going into action, an undesirable class of military offence.

In the midst of the passage, shells began to burst suddenly on every side. Some shells burst in the usual way with a crash, but others seemed to drop almost silently.

Two men in the darkness tumbled off the duck-board, as the result of the shelling. They made no sound, simply fell off.

Just about the same moment a cry went up that rushed down the line, "Gas shells!"

The instant after, every man was holding his breath, tearing his mask out of its cover, and getting it over his face.

Six or seven seconds later, the advancing platoons had changed into a line of masked men, each of whom was nearly blinded, because it was almost impossible to see with the masks in the mist and darkness.

Some men in their haste to get on their masks had

placed their rifles between their knees, but encumbered with many burdens, while in the process of putting on the mask their rifles had slipped and fallen.

Result—rifles picked up again dripping with water. No time to clean them then, with shrapnel and gas bursting all around. Therefore they had to carry on, but by the time they had reached their places in the line, the rifles were no more fit to fire fifteen rounds a minute. If they could get out three rounds per minute with much jamming of the bolt they would be lucky.

The advance had to be carried on in the dark, with masks on. Some of the men inside the masks were breathing heavily, with a choke in their throats. Perhaps they had caught a touch of the deadly gas.

No man spoke.

The existence of the duck-boards aided the advance simply by the touch of wood. The men used the butts of their rifles as walking-sticks, and tapped their way forward along the wooden boarding, but it was dreadfully slow work. They had, however, passed the worst before the shelling broke out. Those who came after were not so fortunate, and paid the price in death.

Strange are these deaths in the night. A man tumbles off the duck-board, and lies still in the lapping water beside. His comrades, half-blinded with the darkness and their masks, stumble over his feet still clinging to the duck-board, until some one in pity lifts them off. His comrades must pass on to battle, because they cannot help the dead, and they cannot wait.

Sometime the stretcher-bearers come and bear him away.

At the end of the duck-boards, Captain Hazlitt's company staggered forward in greater light, but also in greater danger, to their place in front. The dangers were now from bullet and bomb.

Progress with masks was fearfully difficult, and at last Captain Hazlitt removed his mask from his eyes, but left his nose and mouth covered.

It was dangerous. It might mean blindness or death, but there was no other way because he could not see.

Each of his platoon commanders coming up later had to do the same thing. The danger from gas, of course, was less the farther forward they went, and the effect of gas shells is local.

Freed of his mask, Captain Hazlitt could see fairly well, and he led on behind the guide. The first platoon came behind, each man keeping close to the man in front. It was dangerous for bullets, but the only way.

War often presents a choice of things—surrender or death, blindness or leadership, sacrifice or self-preservation,—the soldier has only one answer.

An hour after leaving the duck-boards the company found itself in the assembly trenches, so called.

The company whom they relieved were going out to go through the same inferno of shell and gas. They left behind, with Captain Hazlitt and his men, all that they knew about the enemy and his ways.

Meantime during all these things there was whizzing above their heads the incessant railway-train sort of noise of the terrific outpour of British shells. To glance backwards on the way up was to gaze on a line of stabbing flames spitting into the mist as far as the eye could see. To gaze above was to see the darting flames of shrapnel. To gaze in front was to find the mist pierced by incessant flares.

Strange, lurid, queer—there are no words that can describe the medley of impressions that arise from a night of battle.

But the harrowing and deadly discomforts of the moment displace thoughts of a speculative kind. Cap-

tain Hazlitt's company and all the rest of the "Kate" battalion, and many other battalions were there for the whole duration of the dank night, slouched in mud, water, cold, and misery, waiting in a drizzle of soaking rain for the morn of hope and glory—the morn that was to be Grampia's day.

CHAPTER XVII.

WORK WHILE IT IS NIGHT.

DURING the whole night Grampia's day was being prepared for by ceaseless activity on both sides and by every arm.

Under the earth, on the earth, and above the earth the work went on incessantly. In every nook and corner there was work or watch.

Amid the incessant din of the artillery, once during a lull, the noise of great birds of the air was heard by the infantry below. It was the sound of the —— bombing squadron under Captain Halflex daring forth into the night on the task of destroying these lines of communication and generally damaging enemy works. Numerous attacks had been made during the day, but the night also had been chosen for work to be done under a particularly skilful leader.

And only Captain Halflex and his men could know in full the strangeness of that journey above the incessant travelling of those whizzing shells which the artillery were ceaselessly sending forth. The drones of the engines mingled with the roar of the battle below, but the planes swept on unheeding. The pilots knew that the battle raged below, but they heard only the noise of the engines. At times they realised an effect of the shelling through the air currents.

When they came over the enemy lines the search-lights were turned upon them, and they rose and dived, side-slipped and changed direction frequently, but ever they were pursued, shown up from time to time, white figures in the darkness. But the mist favoured them too, and only the most powerful of the lights availed much.

They rushed on, dropped their bombs and sped home, and the noise of their destruction never even reached the ears of their own front line. What they had achieved they did not know. It was only found out afterwards from prisoners that two bombs had killed and wounded hundreds of men in a battalion marching up to support. That was a satisfactory result from the war point of view, but from the point of view of their mission the work was not a success.

While the planes worked above, special infantry patrols were working on the ground all along the line. "The officers commanding battalions are responsible that wire opposite their own frontage is effectively destroyed, or that a report to the contrary is sent in."

For that reason men crawled and struggled in mud and water in some places, in soaking grass in others, among *débris* and wastage in others, all according to the part of the line where they were engaged.

By 3 A.M. the code word "York" had passed through most of the brigade offices, though a few commanders had sent in "York sick," which meant that the wire was not sufficiently cut. The barrage had been conveniently altered to suit the movements of scouting patrols and enable them to examine the wire for a short time, but the whole proceeding was necessarily hurried.

It was of the essence of the attack that the preparation should not last long.

At 4 A.M. a report on the position of the wire was

before Colonel Berdelin, and he saw General Drakelin upon it. The general was sleeping on a couch fully dressed. He had refused to lie down in the ordinary way so long as there was the least chance of his being required, and messages of different sorts were coming continually all night.

The ——— Brigade of the ——— Division was reported to have suffered heavily on going up to the trenches. Their strength was so reduced as to render the success of attack by them very doubtful. . . . The ——— battalion of the Merkshires was almost wiped out. . . . The state of the wire; the state of the enemy; the position of the artillery; the progress of the barrage. On all these and numerous other matters news came through every few minutes.

Colonel Berdelin troubled his chief only with such things as were important. The state of the wire he reported as a last preliminary.

He produced a plan and indicated the few points where the reports were adverse.

These points troubled the general. "Those few points," he muttered, "are always the places which hold up whole divisions. What about machine-guns?"

"No amount of artillery fire will ever dispose of all the machine-guns while they are kept under ground and brought up at the last moment. At best there will always be a few left."

"A few——" The general reflected.

"We must take *some* risks in war. The air service reports tremendous activity on enemy railways behind, which seem to show some large movement taking place. If we are to succeed in the initial attack, we must take risks and go on."

"Yes. . . . Yes," repeated the general. "Proceed," he said quietly. What his thoughts were he did not say.

All the preparations to proceed, of course, had already been made, but the attack might with difficulty have been delayed if the report on wire, &c., had been too unfavourable.

As it was the reports were tolerable, and the artillery opposite those places where the wire was not sufficiently cut had instructions for smashing it further, which they were still carrying out. Therefore the final state of the wire should be better than the reports.

While generals in half a dozen places were discussing, and infantry were lying in the cold for a score of miles along, waiting their time, and the guns were pounding on viciously, Lieutenant Brailton of the R.F.A. was sitting in a low shelter working desperately by the light of an electric flash-lamp. His hands shook with the nervousness of exhaustion and cold and of a man whom war had rudely shaken. His face was pale and his eyes twitched continuously, but despite all these things he worked on with a stump of a pencil and a paper book.

He was working out the figures for his guns in the barrage that was due to start in about three hours' time.

The barrage time-table had reached him late for some reason, and so he was toiling furiously at his task at the last moment in mud and discomfort, with eyes that twitched at every explosion.

The schedule said that the infantry barrage would open at 6 A.M. It would rest for ten minutes on a line A to K shown on plan, and would then advance at the rate of — yards per — minute. It would rest at F for fifteen minutes, and would then advance again, and so on it ran, the technical story which conveyed to the gunners the times and methods by which a hail of fire and intensive fire was to be poured on the Hun, at

the same time at which it flew over the heads and covered the advance of the infantry. That hail of fire was to force the Hun riflemen and machine-gunners to keep their heads down while the British infantry advanced, and also to kill, frighten, and generally incapacitate the enemy, until the attackers could get far enough forward to use the bayonet.

Lieutenant Brailton, preparing his share of the work, worked under great difficulties. It was a comparatively easy job to make up gun time-tables in comfortable offices with pen and ink and rulers or typewriters and all that, but to sit in mud under a roof that allowed rain to drip down from numerous places on the paper, working with a disreputable stump of pencil, amid the thunder of innumerable guns, that was decidedly troublous.

He had no table to write on, and worked with his knees as platform. He was seated on a sopping sand-bag.

The time-table had to be worked out for every gun separately, and different allowances had to be made for all the guns owing to the much-worn condition of their bores and other gunner problems.

He had almost finished his work when a shell burst near his shelter, and his light went out. The lamp disappeared somewhere unknown, while the edifice shook all over.

The bursting of the shell was a small matter, but the loss of the lamp was a calamity of the first order. He groped about for it in the dark, but could not retrieve it.

"Williams!" he shouted. "Williams!"

There was no answer, but the sound of more shell bursts.

"Williams!" he shouted again.

This time he put his head out at the door. He sniffed the air for an instant. At the same moment a voice from somewhere shouted, "Gas shells!"

He hastily pulled his head in, held his breath, and put on his respirator.

When he had completed the operation he sat still for a few moments in darkness. He could see nothing through his mask. For a few seconds there was quiet; apparently the guns had stopped to allow the gunners to get their respirators on. Then the firing was resumed. The gunners were at work again with their masks on, breathing heavily, but still lifting those shells, loading and firing.

Brailton thought of nothing but the task on which he was engaged. He wondered why Williams had not answered. But he was so well accustomed to finding the required man wanting that he had learned to do without help in most circumstances.

He got down on his knees and started to grope for the lamp.

Among loose earth his fingers groped slowly and feelingly.

Suddenly he gave a grunt of satisfaction. He had touched the frame of the flash-lamp. He took it out and set it up again relit.

Then he gazed at his paper, but he could not read the figures. He cleaned the eye-pieces of his mask, but still he could not see. The thing troubled him greatly, because he thought that he ought to have been able to see, but try as he would, he could not read those tables in that light, and time was passing swiftly.

For a few minutes he sat in thought. There was no one else to get those figures out. If he did not do it, there was no one who would see that barrage started and working. The guns might fire on somehow,

but the support the infantry required would not be given unless these tables were ready.

It was a very simple problem. All he had to do was to complete the tables. To enable him to do so all he required was a quarter of an hour with his gas mask off. Only if he took it off, he might be poisoned. If he didn't take it off, or create those tables somehow, he would fail in his duty to his country.

Of course it never occurred to him that he would fail in his duty.

Accordingly he sniffed the air for a moment through the side of his mask. It did not feel too desperately bad.

He took out a match and with it lit some paper which he had in his pocket and waved it about in the shelter, with a vague idea of clearing the air of lurking gas. It was a feeble expedient, but he thought it might help.

After he had done that he took his mask off his eyes and completed the tables. While he worked his eyes twitched.

When the tables were complete he put his mask over his eyes again, and talking through his mask, arranged the matter of the action of the guns in the barrage with the N.C.O.'s in charge of the guns.

Having completed these duties he sat and waited in silence. As he did so, he felt his eyes watering and twitching painfully. That feeling grew gradually worse, and dim horror crept over him, but he made no sound.

It appeared to him that the light was growing fainter. He lifted up his flash-lamp and placed it near him. Then he cleaned the eye-pieces of his mask again. After that he held his pencil in one hand and a whistle in the other, beside the light of the lamp. He could not determine what either of these articles was.

He came to the conclusion that he was rapidly ceasing to see.

On the following day he was taken to hospital as suffering from "gas," and in a few days' time became completely blind.

But the barrage was carried on in terms of his orders and time-table. It had not occurred to him that the barrage should be allowed to fail, even if his eyesight were to be lost, a danger of which he was quite well aware. And there are actually people in the world who can think of letting munitions fail for the sake of mere money.

He might or might not recover his sight.

While gas shells were being poured on the artillery, the infantry in front, including Captain Hazlitt's company, were free from that trouble. The wind was blowing away from them, and all gas shells were fired to drop farther back.

The drizzling rain gradually soaking through their coats, combined with the falling of bombs and the muddy discomfort of their position, were enough trouble for them. Amid all the trouble, they hugged their rifles underneath their coats and strove to keep them dry for action.

They had always the last hope. If every rifle failed—the bayonet.

So they lay and waited. And many a man, as he lay, wished to desperation that the hour of attack would come and let them get it over.

Queer—strange—wonderful are those hours, and the thoughts of men.

Some are too numbed and cold and deadened by incessant noise and exposure to care anything more for anything at all; they are only aware of silent misery.

The sentries lie watching through those frequent flare lights during their hour of duty, glaring out with their rifle clutched to them, more to try and preserve it from destruction by wet than from any fear. Some on the completion of their hour fall numbly asleep. Others lie huddled waiting, striving to stick where they may, as dry as the ground and their hole in it will allow. They cannot sleep. They gaze up vaguely at those lights, see them hang bright for a few moments, then flutter down. They see the S.O.S. signals go up somewhere, and hear increased thundering of guns. They see an occasional rat or mouse crawl to an empty tin; they see around them in outline the oddments of battle, the remnants left by the many that have been there before.

They see, silently; they think—little. A stray vision of home comes to them; a vague comparison passes in their minds of those pleasant places they have known. But mid it all, increasingly the constant rattle of war keeps their minds unconsciously attracted by the scenes around.

And officers are but men. They too feel mud and misery. An occasional shelter holds them, or does not. The rain soaks down; they feel more sodden hour by hour. They make their rounds from time to time, and crawl back to their holes. While doing so, they complete odd details for battle, and see all men in their proper places. Having done so, they also wait for the hour.

New men are there, and old hands. The new wonder; the old expect.

Back in a shelter three hundred yards from the front line, Colonel Bardelaine, commanding 14th Rokeshires, sat motionless. His adjutant sat near him. The colonel was a Catholic, but the adjutant was not.

The adjutant knew the colonel's religious views and expressed no surprise.

In the shelter was a lighted candle, and beside it a crucifix. Through the whole night of waiting the colonel sat and gazed upon the crucifix.

If a message came in, he attended to his duty, then returned to his vigil.

The adjutant sat silently. Neither of them referred to any matter of religion. The adjutant felt a little awed. He had heard of the vigil of knighthood and other old-world customs. He realised vague reminiscences of cavaliers and roundheads and monks, and a swift recollection flashed through his mind—a scrap of history, "Praise God Barebones" and "damned Barebones." He did not smile, but felt the ideas ludicrous.

He controlled his mind and came back to current events to reflect that of all the things he had thought of meeting in battle, never had he expected to meet a man with a crucifix, turning a little corner, the very storm-centre of a great battlefield, into an altar.

The adjutant listened to the incessant burrowing noise of shells passing overhead, to the crashing of those that were bursting, to the crackle of rifles. He gazed out through a slit in the doorway of the shelter into the semi-darkness, he gazed at the message-pads in front of him, and the pile of messages received, tucked under one file.

Once again he gazed at the crucifix and continued to gaze. It fascinated him. He thought that if he lived a thousand years he would never forget that silent scene, the scene of himself alone, and the silent colonel, together in the stillness of that shelter amid the terrific clamour of war.

But the adjutant was a little depressed too. The colonel's face was immutably stern. The adjutant had

no clue to his thoughts. He knew the colonel as a stern disciplinarian, and otherwise very little.

He wondered what the colonel thought, but dared not ask. He was sure the colonel was not praying for his own life, because he knew him to be totally indifferent to danger. From the sternness of his face he thought that he must at least be praying to Jehovah the God of battles.

But while the adjutant's mind was occupied with such thoughts, his other subconscious mind was continually on the battle.

And so the night dragged on, in mist and drizzle, gas, shell, stench, with weary men, waiting officers, toiling gunners, flying men, wounded men, dying men, dead men, stretcher-bearers, doctors, one praying colonel, one staring adjutant, toiling runners, ticking signallers; and behind them all, those roads, still crowded with the endless train of men struggling up through illimitable mud, with that "last gasp" oddment of preparation, somebody's iron rations, or the bombs detonated to replace the bombs that some fool had sent up undetonated.

What a business! Much of it horrible, but the whole redeemed by one thing only, the fortitude and heroism of the men engaged.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KICK OFF.

YET a few scenes to describe before the battle breaks.

On the night before the attack, at a broken-down house in a cellar with top reinforced with concrete and covered with sandbags, a staff captain was seated on a rickety chair. An orderly sat on the floor near him. In front of the captain was a litter of papers and maps, and immediately before him two watches.

As battalions marched up the road towards the battlefield, the officers of every battalion and company looked in to see this captain, who automatically said a few things.

"Good evening. Who are you? . . . A Company, 14th Rokeshires?" He noted the name on paper, "Yes. It's now 9.55 exactly. I'll give you it again in a minute. . . . Now 9.56. Yes. Good night."

In that way scores of officers going to their several places synchronised their watches for the great push. A comical thing to think of, too—though very important—these fatted staff captains, or additional captains, solemnly synchronising hundreds of watches amidst a great battle.

The weary subalterns tied their luminous watches on their wrists, gazed round on that concreted haven of

safety and synchronisation, and grimly stepped out into the darkness of the thunderous night.

Not every man who states that he has been through a great battle has undergone excessive risk. However, they may have done useful work.

The subsequent duties of the captain were conducted in the same comparative comfort.

Colonel Grayling held a conference of his officers, as most other colonels did, prior to going up.

Colonel Grayling had not much to say, since he was a man of few words and rather blunt manner. He spoke quite quietly. Indeed so quiet and cool did he appear that a stranger unfamiliar with the circumstances would never have thought that he was about to lead his men in a great battle. He did not make a speech, merely talked.

"I've only called you together, gentlemen, to say that there are no alterations on the instructions already given. The artillery gives intensive fire up to 5.55. We start off at 6 A.M. We take Poke and Pike, and hold them at all costs, with a line running through them. You will be guided by circumstances as to utilising the German trenches, where they exist, or not.

"The line of direction is fortunately exceptionally good. As we have our left rested on a sort of ditch which you all know from the map, the right have only to dress by the left, and Poke and Pike are quite clear.

"The formations you know, and, as I said before, the moppers-up are to do their work thoroughly. That's very important. We don't want any more of our men shot in the back. . . .

"Think that's about all.

"Anybody any questions?"

Two of the company commanders made some inquiries, and were answered. A few of the new subalterns realised a desire to ask many questions, but kept silent. As David Macgrew, the youngest subaltern in the battalion remarked, "I'd have liked to ask a lot of questions, but thought I'd better not show my ruddy, awful ignorance."

"Don't worry, old thing," said Hazlitt. "We were all ignorant once, but it's common-sense and a cool head that takes the biscuit every time."

The colonel's last remarks were: "Remember, when you get up, about consolidation and getting patrols out.

"That's all, gentlemen. Go straight for it."

They saluted smartly—the number of officers who were going up into the push, and of whom several were not to return.

Pass on several hours in time to 5.15 A.M. The battle opens three-quarters of an hour later, and a man dressed in German uniform is lying in a shell-hole only seven yards from the British line at Gruler's Point. The two lines are about eighty yards apart there.

The man has been lying there for hours, but only at 5.15 A.M. does he hear anything.

One of those curious lulls in noise which occur in battles takes place.

A man creeps up to another shell-hole, and enough light is beginning to exist to make a man dimly visible.

The German, in his hole, cranes his head forward.

Suddenly a voice speaks. "When we kick-off, sergeant-major——"

The rest of the speech is lost to the German. His head is drawn back, his staring hunted eyes are glaring around, but in his head are the words, "When we kick-off——"

Behind him is a low ditch, by which he has come. Cautiously, stealthily, he turns and creeps backward. The rolling noise of battle covers his movement.

About ten minutes to six he drops into the German trench, or what remains of it. He rushes along fearfully through empty trenches to a tunnel, dives in and down a stairway. He enters a great dug-out, where many men were lying down.

He speaks to an N.C.O. who is waiting. "Kick-off . . . football. . . . Means attack. . . . Yes. . . . Couldn't hear the hour. . . ."

The N.C.O. does not understand English. The man does. The N.C.O. wonders what to report. The man is excited.

The N.C.O. calls him a fool of several kinds for not bringing more information, but goes off to report to a visiting officer.

The officer examines the man, and stares suspiciously at him.

The officer orders immediate readiness of all machine-guns and men on the spot, and goes back to report.

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If an aeroplane could have been placed above the lines at 5.50 A.M., in a stationary position, with an observer free to gaze and able to see all that was below him, and if he had possessed powerful glasses to enable him to pick out every detail, he would have gazed on a country with a frontage of roughly twenty miles. On the winding roads behind he would have counted the ever-moving snake-like columns twisting along and up those roads. In front he would have seen men crouching in all manner of attitudes, in one place with full trenches, farther along with part trenches, farther along still with

only a jumble of shell-holes. But one thing he would have seen common to them all—the attitude of concealment.

Behind these front rows he would have seen further rows of men, nearly all of these in fairly complete trenches, standing waiting with rifles and fixed bayonets. Among these trenches—and partly farther forward too—he would have seen all sorts of little emplacements, mostly camouflaged to resemble the surrounding ground, obviously containing machine-guns or trench-mortar batteries. Farther back still he would have seen the lines of artillery, with the guns camouflaged in part, but mostly without much concealment, all spouting forth death. From a large number of places farther back he would also see the heavier guns and howitzers pumping forth continuously.

Behind and among three woods, occurring at different points, he could have detected cavalry horses in considerable numbers picketed about, with a few cavalymen in attendance.

Still farther back he would have seen, at squadron headquarters and wing headquarters, numbers of aeroplanes of different types drawn up in waiting to move—these, of course, exclusive of others which might happen to be buzzing around himself.

If the eye with which he saw could have penetrated earth, sandbags, concrete, &c., he would have defined various mounds, houses, dug-outs, &c., as divisional, brigade, and battalion headquarters. If he were expert, indeed he might have determined these by the markings on the ground intended for the aeroplanes to see for purposes of communication.

In short, if such an observer could have gazed down at 5.50 A.M., he would have seen the complete staging of

the opening scene of the most tremendous drama earth and man can provide.

It is only lack of imagination that makes the world thrill so little over these extraordinary scenes. An actual fight with bared knives between a couple of Lascars at the quay will send women shrieking over a few drops of blood. But let men by the hundred thousand go across the top to fight desperately and spend seas of blood in a great cause, and let the thing happen a hundred miles away and be reported vaguely in print, and the same people who faint at the sight of a single cut merely glance over the news, and are often not greatly concerned provided their own relatives are not immediately engaged.

It is a curious instance of the opacity of the human mind, and the immense concentration which many people give to their own affairs.

At 5.51 A.M. M'Cheyne was passing along the line. "Keep those heads and bayonets down! And remember what you've been told,—This is Grampia's day!"

M'Cheyne was an old soldier and knew well the value of steadiness, and it was one of his maxims for battle that, if there were many new soldiers, there was nothing that steadied them better than hearing a sergeant "tellin' them what they've been telt afore for the fifty-first time. . . . Ye see, it's like this—they get into a great battle, and they dinna ken what it's like and aw that; and they're a wee thing scared like, maybe—especially if there's a long wait—and then suddenly they hear the sergeant's voice cursin' away just as usual; and so they think to themsel's—Aw, that's aw recht; there's the sergeant gassin' away as much as ever,—and it sort of steadies them. It sounds familiar when everything else is strange."

The men kept their bayonets a little closer.

At 5.55 A.M. there occurred the second great suspensive pause. The artillery ceased fire over a considerable part of the line.

When that happened, there was only one part of the German line at which activity sprang immediately into being—Gruler's Point. At that point men started to rush up from below with machine-guns to holes and dug emplacements, so that the ground which a few moments before had been free of defence was in a few minutes a formidable stronghold.

At six o'clock the artillery opened fire with covering barrage, and at the same moment the infantry rose out of their trenches and holes and went over the top—twenty miles of infantry.

The barrage was of terrific intensity. Every battery in the line, every trench-mortar battery, and every detailed machine-gun had opened at the same moment, and the molten stream of lead whizzed over their heads as they walked across the intervening space.

Every man of "Kate" battalion went over except one. M'Cheyne saw that one in a hole. He was a small white-faced boy, and seemed almost paralysed with cold or fright.

"My lad, why are you not over the top?" At the same moment M'Cheyne handled his rifle visibly.

The boy said nothing. "Get up!" bawled the sergeant. "Ye're only scunnered."

Suddenly the boy gave a gasp, made a wild wriggle, then stumbled out of his hole and went forward.

M'Cheyne gave a last growl to hasten his progress. "Scunnered" was his expression for these things. "Stage fright" is perhaps the idea.

The boy, of course, did quite well, and told stories about the battle in billets two days later. M'Cheyne

never told the boy's comrades about his tardiness to begin.

Once over the top, the "Kate" battalion advanced with remarkable ease. The only obstacle to a more rapid advance was the broken nature of the ground.

Scattered Huns, battered, vacant-faced, and scare-eyed with terror, began to appear and hold their hands up. The moppers-up coming in rear of the leading line dealt with these according to their deserts—disarmed the genuine prisoner, and killed the shooter in the back. That was the business of the moppers—the killing of stray Huns, snipers and bombers, and the clearing out of dug-outs and holes after the front line had passed over them.

The advance was so rapid that the infantry actually found themselves running into the barrage, and a halt was made. The line knelt down for one minute. All stragglers got time to come abreast of the remainder. Then the barrage commenced to advance again, and the infantry rose and struggled onward. As they proceeded, the enemy guns began to open fire, but as they were shelling the line from which the infantry had advanced, the shells fell much behind them. However, a few men dropped here and there from scattered bullets which whizzed about from all sides.

Apparently the Hun had been completely taken by surprise at this point, and the line pressed on over trenches well-nigh obliterated. The ruins of Poke House and Pike Farm appeared clearly in view, and from Poke the first serious resistance was experienced. A machine-gun began to rattle and bullets to whiz in lightning succession, but fortunately the broken nature of the ground reduced the casualties.

Captain Hazlitt's company halted. The companies on each flank also halted, but their wings continued to con-

verge by leaps forward of small groups of men, the effect of which was an encircling movement around Poke.

At the same moment, two light trench-mortars which had come up with the advance got into action, and hurled 10-lb. shells on the broken-down house, a number of the shells falling with remarkable accuracy.

Under cover of these shells and a scattered rifle fire from the flanks, Captain Hazlitt gave the order, and the company advanced again. Men leapt forward around shell-holes and over *débris*, dead Huns, broken rifles, tin cans, &c. At first they advanced cautiously, but as no further opposition was experienced, the whole line once more went forward.

In an hour's time, "Kate" battalion was in possession of Poke and Pike and a line running through them.

The advance had in fact been a "walk-over."

At 7 P.M. Captain Hazlitt sent his first message by runner: "Poke captured, with line on both flanks secured. Am consolidating and pushing out patrols. Casualties about 20. . . ." When the runner started to go back with the message, a heavy fire was being poured on the old lines from which they had advanced, and the task of getting through seemed almost hopeless. Nevertheless, the man struggled on.

But the contact aeroplane arrived above them, and found their position before the runner's message was delivered.

The plane was ordered to be above Poke at 7.30 A.M., and failing report then, at every hour thereafter.

Punctually to the moment the plane arrived and swooped down, firing the signal call for the flares which had, by Captain Hazlitt's orders, been waiting for the aeroplane. At the very moment of arrival, the lurid red flames burst forth in their holes, and the war-bird sailed away contented.

A quarter of an hour later the plane had flown back to the report centre, signalled in code, and subsequently descended and given further particulars.

But the flare lights which told the aeroplane where the advance had reached, also told the enemy. No doubt the flares were lit at the bottom of holes, but the presence of the aeroplane, combined with stray light, had doubtless given the position away.

At all events, there broke out very shortly after a heavy fire directed on Poke House and neighbourhood.

At the moment, Captain Hazlitt's men were hard at work digging a line of trench for immediate use, or rather converting various holes and bits of trench into a continuous trench. When shells began to burst among them, they were none too well prepared despite an hour's digging.

The observing aeroplane for the artillery began to signal continually to the guns engaged in counter-battery work, and an almost ceaseless stream of shell continued to pour across the lines to the German gun positions; but the total result, as far as Captain Hazlitt's company was concerned, was not too great, and men fell frequently wounded or dead.

And Poke House and line was to be held at all costs.

As the shrapnel and explosive burst continuously around them, men crouched lower and dug upwards, as far as possible, from concealed positions; but every stratagem could not prevent many deaths.

The rain had by this time ceased to fall at this point, and the clouds cleared, so that the battlefield existed in comparatively clear light, except for the smoke of shell-bursts and earth and dust. That clearing of the air tended rather to help the enemy, and possibly aided the coming of the counter-attack.

The fire of the enemy guns suddenly increased in intensity, and the men on whom the rain of shell was falling clung closer to their particular scraps of protection.

Simultaneously with the increased fire, a serried mass of men appeared out of the ground about 300 yards away and began to run forward unsteadily towards the British line. The moment they appeared a man with signal lights fired the S.O.S. The guns behind had received from artillery headquarters through the aeroplane report news of the position at Poke House, and within one minute of the signal a whirlwind of shell was bursting several hundred yards in front of the infantry. The shells mostly burst too far back to stop the front advance, but prevented the coming up of reinforcements.

The repulsing of the hasty counter-attack rested with "Kate" battalion, and weary men hastily got themselves into firing positions. The main part of the defence rested with the men of the Lewis-gun teams which had been pushed out in shell-holes in front. By the very fact of their position in advance of the rest, what might have appeared the more dangerous position had actually proved more safe, and they had not lost a man.

The two guns in advance were resting, covered with waterproof sheets, simply waiting for a counter-attack.

As soon as the enemy were well in view both guns opened and the attack faded away into nothingness.

"It was like knocking down ninepins," was the observation of one of the gunners who came out.

Such as were not disposed of by the Lewis guns were picked off by rifle shot, and once more "Kate" battalion had peace to carry on their work, broken only by intermittent shell fire.

The work was tedious. They had taken part in a

glorious advance, which so far as they were concerned had proved successful beyond all expectation, and the newspapers in London a few hours later were being published reporting the success of the first round and stating that the men were in magnificent spirits.

“Brawny Highlanders were to be seen cheerfully smoking cigarettes, waving trophies of victory in the middle of the battlefield, &c.!”

Well, that sort of thing may be true occasionally. Few things can be said to happen which might not possibly have happened, but these proceedings are not the usual article.

The spirits of people who spend a night lying in drizzling rain doing their best to keep themselves warm and their ammunition dry, are not generally at their highest after the main part of the attack has been made.

The thing is over for the time being, and their job is the tiresome one of digging among dead enemies and friends a place of safety for themselves as a cover against shell fire, which is liberally poured over them.

Think rather of the “Kate” battalion men, successful though they were, digging stiffly on from hour to hour, preparing for the heavier counter-attack which they knew was bound to come sooner or later.

Think of them stopping by turns to eat the bully-beef and biscuits which they had carried up in their kit—eating it hungrily as men who had gone through much, who had endured cold and rain from heaven and hell, water-rain from heaven and shell-rain from the devil’s representatives on earth.

Think of them working grimly on with their friends dead beside them, and many of their companions lying helplessly wounded, and waiting their turn in chilly misery to be carried away.

The spirit of these men is the grim spirit of a fierce determination.

Captain Hazlitt's message and messages from other company commanders passed through battalion and brigade headquarters and on to division, corps, and army. Along with the infantry reports there were pouring in continuously to the army reports from all the branches engaged.

"Pip" and "Nip" battalions situated about a mile along to the east of "Kate" and "Kit" were almost equally successful and subject to less shell fire than the other two, but their positions were much less clearly defined. "Kate" and "Kit" completely identified their positions by stating that Poke and Pike had been taken and that their line rested on these positions with secured flanks, but "Pip" and "Nip" were in the air except for small landmarks, and the description of their position for artillery and other purposes was difficult.

It might have been possible to define a line by saying that the advance had gone one thousand or eleven hundred yards forward and parallel with the old line, if the commanders in their advance had had leisure to count the number of paces taken, but they hadn't. Also the line wasn't parallel to the old line. Unconsciously a shifting had taken place which had the effect of creating a line in parts truly not parallel but at an angle of forty-five degrees or more to the old line. If the officers reporting had said parallel to the old line in places they would probably have been shot in the back by their own artillery fire dropping short.

Altogether it was a difficult position to define, and platoon commanders working on skeleton maps of the area, and strictly enjoined to send in sketches of their

position at the earliest moment, gazed about them in considerable trouble.

Mr Kensley, commanding No. 3 platoon of the "Pip" battalion, sat in a hole in the ground surrounded by masses of clammy earth, gazing at a small squared sketch-map of the earth on which they were fighting. On the map appeared many dots, each representing farm-houses or ruined houses or concreted pill-boxes, but after the struggle of the day he was totally unable to determine which of these dots were represented by the things around him. The smoke and dust of battle hanging all around did not make things clearer, because he could not clearly see any distant objects, a few of which had been given as direction points.

His company commander was wounded, and Mr Kensley was left in command of the company. In the midst of the battle he was literally sweating with anxiety. For the tenth time he said to himself, "Where the hell are we?"

He had a suspicion that they were off the area covered by the map-sketch altogether.

He gazed at those dots in desperation. Then he took his pencil and traced a line vaguely across the map. "We must have gone a thousand yards," he muttered. "And we must be straight on from where we were, otherwise our line couldn't be continuous as it is."

He feebly inserted on the back of the sketch, "We are on the line A-B." He communicated some further information and sent off the runner, but he had little faith in the work. He thought it was somewhere near correct.

About the same time many other company or platoon commanders sent in sketches which much desperate thought had evolved. Some of these were correct, some incorrect.

The result at battalion headquarters was that the "Pip" battalion appeared to have advanced about 600 yards in some places and about 1000 in others. The colonel gazed at the things in amazement. He wished to send out for further inquiry, but the brigade were furiously demanding information, and he had to communicate.

At the same time "Nip" battalion also communicated ambiguous information.

The result was a furious brigadier. "My God! My God!" he cried. "Victory absolutely in our hands and we can't exploit it as we ought because these wretched company and platoon commanders don't know their job. We can't get on till we know the position exactly, and these blasted sketches bring nothing but confusion. My God! it's terrible!"

The brigadier seized his sketching apparatus and sprang to his feet. The brigade major stared.

"What are you going to do, sir?"

"Do! Do! I'm going up myself to do it. If *they* can't site the position, I can!"

The brigade major rose. "No, I don't want you or anybody. I'll go up alone."

"But, sir——"

"I'm going!" he shouted. "It's never to be said that we lost the fruits of victory because my brigade couldn't tell where they were."

The brigade major stared. The elderly brigadier stamped forth into the battle.

The major shook his head. "Old fire-eater!" he murmured half sadly.

The fire-eater strode up into battle contemptuous of shells or any other thing, and conscious only of his own wrath.

Arrived in the line, he surveyed it from end to end so far as held by his brigade, sat sketching in a hole,

used his compass, and ascertained exactly where they were.

He returned with his soul full of determination that after the battle every officer in the brigade was to be taught field-sketching and compass work with a vigour never known before.

About five hundred yards from his headquarters a mere stray bullet whizzing across the battlefield struck him dead.

In his map-case they found the sketches carefully siting the position, and they proved useful.

But the divisional general said he would rather have done without the sketches than lost the "fire-eater."

But men are built in different moulds.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GENERAL STRUGGLE.

ALONG the twenty-mile front the fortunes of the day varied according to circumstances.

About three miles from "Deer" Brigade the "Tan" Brigade was ordered at all costs to take the village of Danker.

That village consisted of about six houses, the ruins of which were known to be heavily fortified and containing machine-guns which all the artillery poured upon them it was feared did not obliterate.

But headquarters had the less trouble about this, because the village was one of the places which had been mined, and whenever the advance commenced the whole thing was to go up in destruction, with the resulting displacement or burial of machine-guns.

"Tan" Brigade advanced under the barrage as ordered, and at a short distance from Danker knelt down to await the explosion. The chances of their own destruction from flying fragments of the village, &c., were ignored as part of the risks of battle.

An officer of the engineers sat with the handle of the exploder waiting for the moment when he should be informed that all was ready.

On that happening he pressed the handle and waited.

Immediately after a terrific explosion was heard, causing the earth to tremble for a considerable distance.

In front of the waiting "Tan" Brigade huge lumps of earth and *débris* rose high in the air and crashed downwards to the earth, crashing and breaking as they went or fell. It was a mighty cascade of earth and *débris*.

To the men of the "Tan" Brigade the spectacle was an amazing one. They were stunned by the noise and force of the explosion, and shaken by the falling of innumerable fragments and clods strewing all around. Fortunately a part of the heavier bulk of earth relapsed largely into the crater again.

For a few seconds nothing was clear, but when the earth had had time to settle they gazed across to see the ruins of the village ahead of them, but unfortunately the village was still there, and between the brigade and the village was a yawning gulf.

The mine had been laid just short of the village instead of under it. There had been a miscalculation by the engineers, and the plan that was to have vanquished a deadly stronghold had for the time being made it more invulnerable.

The men stared ahead in blank amazement.

But the orders were to advance and take the village.

Major Baker was in command of the "Rim" battalion. He thought he saw a chance. If they could get into the crater and attack from there, they would be below the machine-gun fire, and men could creep forward by parties and attack the village from the flanks.

He gave the signal to advance, and through the residue of still descending rubbish the battalion struggled forward.

As they did so, the machine-guns opened a savage sweeping fire from the village, and men began to drop all along the line.

However, they were near the edge of the crater, and many crawled in. They descended to the bottom of the

crater, but there they found a terrible thing had happened. As the result of the rain which had fallen and the muddy state of the ground, there had collected in the bottom of the crater what amounted to little less than a small lake, treacherously deep in parts, and which extended along the whole bottom of the crater. As a consequence of the formation of the mine, the crater had evolved not so much circular as like a very broad ditch, the ends of which would only permit a few to cross at a time.

The result on the "Rim" battalion was that crowds of men were gathered along the edge of this filthy pond, and valuable time was being lost.

They commenced to fling loose lumps of earth in places into the water, and create mud-dams for crossing.

In the midst of the operation, the men caught the noise of the coming of a missile they knew too well, commonly known as the "flying pig."

Thud! Crash! The mighty missile burst with terrific force on the very edge of the crater. It had burst short, but with its fragments a few men were wounded.

"Come on!" shouted the major. His position was terrible. To remain there meant certain death for himself and his men. To go back meant almost certain death. To go forward was the only chance.

Even as he shouted, another missile was coming, and smaller bombs began to crash dully. Many men were falling while he was shouting.

But the remainder saw. Some plunged into the muddy pond and sank hopelessly; others, more lucky, splashed through on higher or firmer ground, and others got across on the lumps of earth thrown in.

They struggled up to the other side of the crater amid the incessant bursting of bombs.

On the very edge of the crater the major himself fell back dead.

A captain took his place, shouting "Forward! Forward!"

With him a score of men broke over the top and rushed stubbornly forward towards the village, but only one man came within twenty yards of the nearest house.

A lieutenant in the crater took command of all who were left. He had noticed that bombs were not falling to the same extent at the left end of the crater, and he waved and shouted to men to follow him there.

He lay down there and waited.

The fate of the first frontal attack made him hesitate to fling more men at the village. On the other hand, he could not remain where he was. To do so merely meant death by degrees.

There were a few odd lumps of earth lying on the left flank of the village which afforded slight cover. Looking round for a leader, he saw a sergeant, and shouted to him. The sergeant came.

"Take forty men and work round the flank by those lumps of earth."

The sergeant automatically said, "Yes, sir."

"I will come with the remainder in support."

"Yes, sir."

"Go as fast as you can and get into them. If you can get a house, stick to it and work for the others. Try to destroy the frontal fire from the nearest house. You may be able to get into the left house."

"Yes, sir."

"Then go on."

The sergeant turned round and pointed to a group of men. "All you follow me, man by man!" he bawled.

Then he turned and rose rapidly over the lip of the

crater, and ran for the first lump of earth. He got there.

The lieutenant sent the second man running, and the sergeant bounded on again. Man after man rushed out.

The enemy had not anticipated this rush, perhaps thinking that none had been left in the crater. For nearly half a minute the bolting forward continued uninterrupted. Then machine-guns opened fire from both houses; but the lieutenant, with eyes over the lip of the crater, could see the sergeant and at least ten men near the left house and still moving. Other men were crawling forward.

While the lieutenant waited, the bombs were still dropping in the crater to the right. He was praying to God they would continue to drop there. It was his only hope. Of several hundred men who had got in there, only about a hundred were left.

The lieutenant's eyes were glued on the sergeant and his men. There were only ten men ahead of that machine-gun fire in such a way as to escape it. Most of the rest were certain to be hit if they moved.

Only ten men and a sergeant to attack a powerfully held village.

The lieutenant waiting there knew it was a forlorn hope, but still——

Still he hoped, and waited. With intense expectancy he realised the dropping and bursting of bombs, and at the same time watched the stealthy movements of those men.

He saw the sergeant signal to the men. A few seconds later he saw them rise and run swiftly for the back of the house. A crackle of rifle shots sounded, and a machine-gun burst forth venomously, but only one man dropped.

The sergeant and his men disappeared round the

back of the ruin. A moment later the lieutenant heard an unmistakable yell.

As he lay, he wondered. Should he rush forward and attempt to support them, or wait till the sergeant got the left house? Rushing forward meant almost certain death from the fire proceeding from the machine-guns in the front house. If the sergeant could but get the left house, he could probably bring pressure to bear from behind on the front house.

The yell which he had heard was no British yell, he thought.

But it was very difficult to guess what was happening. There had been only one cry. It might merely have been a warning to others.

While the lieutenant waited, the sergeant was working round the ruin. He found it completely barricaded. To go on the street side of the house was to come under fire from other houses. To delay meant death.

The sergeant took the chances of things.

He took his only bomb from his pocket and tossed it over the top of the ruined wall into the inside of the house. Immediately after he seized a broken piece of log that was lying on the ground, and with it as a battering-ram charged what seemed the most vulnerable place in the side of the wall.

His charge was unexpectedly successful. At the moment of the charge the bomb he had thrown burst inside with a loud report, which tended to distract the holders of the place. At the same time the onslaught on the side of the house brought down considerable loose masonry already shaken by shell fire, and a rift appeared in the side of the house enough for entry.

The sergeant seized his rifle and bayonet from a man who was holding them temporarily, and charged into the breach.

With a cartridge in his rifle, he shot a man who appeared, and dashed onwards recklessly with his bayonet. The nine men with him followed shouting fiercely.

The unexpectedness of the attack, and the sheer ferocity of the attackers, appeared to have taken the defenders completely by surprise.

The men who were working the machine-guns had all been engaged facing in the opposite direction, and now they were attacked in the back.

The weapon they were accustomed to use was the machine-gun working at a distance from the persons they killed. They were hurriedly seizing rifles, and preparing to defend. One man was engaged in turning a machine-gun about to fire backwards, but it was all too late.

The sergeant was desperate with desperate work to do, and he and his men charged with bayonet.

It was at that moment that the lieutenant heard further noise coming from the left house. There were shouts and sounds as if a desperate struggle were going on.

The defenders of the house numbered a dozen men, and they fought as they could, like tigers. There was no question of surrender on either side. It was sheer deadly work—fighting to kill.

A couple of shots from the rifle fired at point-blank range by two of the sergeant's men killed two of the Germans. The rest was done with the bayonet, and in the narrow area the fighting was savage in the extreme.

But the Germans were no match for the sergeant's desperation and that of his men. Cut, thrust, crash with the butt, and down they went in pools of blood.

Inside five minutes it was all over, and the place was a shambles of dead. The sergeant had lost three more men, and there were no Germans left.

Before the fight was even finished a bomb crashed into the back-end of the ruin. Possibly the throwers thought the sergeant and his men were there.

The sergeant had fought desperately, and the coming of the bomb made him madder than ever. "Mean to blow us up, the —, friend or foe, doesn't matter a d—n which!"

The sergeant's eyes were staring furiously. He had just finished a fierce fight which had called for all his strength, and yet it was only the beginning. Now if he was to keep alive and help his friends, he would have to attack and fight another desperate struggle.

For a single instant he paused to take breath. He was breathing heavily.

It was only for an instant. He turned rapidly, and got his men out on the outer side of the wall by which they had entered. If more bombs were to come they would be fairly safe there. Then he peered through a crevice in the wall at the front house almost opposite.

When he looked there, he saw a sight that made him start. Men were gathering behind that house to attack him.

He turned back and called his men in again.

He gazed around him. There were three German machine-guns in the place. One was at a loophole where it could be pointed exactly where the men were gathering. Oh, if only he could fire that gun!

He glanced with little hope at his men. "Any man know anything of machine-guns?" he cried.

"Yes, sergeant."

"Then for God's sake fire that gun, and fire it quick!"

The gun was standing ready loaded. There were no loopholes for rifles in that side of the wall, the machine-gun loophole being the only one.

The man got down hurriedly, sighted the gun, and a moment later fired a dozen rounds into the gathering men. The whole thing had scarcely taken a minute. Several men dropped, and the rest dashed out of sight.

After the dozen rounds had been fired, the gun jammed. However, it had served its purpose. The man who was working it could not get it to work again, but the sergeant didn't worry about that.

Four more of his men suddenly appeared. They had crawled forward during the struggle. He had now ten men again, and every man except himself had a bomb.

But the house opposite formed a much more powerful stronghold than the one he had taken, and the approaches to it were covered by fire from other houses.

As the sergeant peered through a crevice at the front house, he almost despaired of success. Whatever he thought of seemed but to foreordain death.

He continued for a few moments to strive in thought desperately. While he did so, the battle elsewhere was raging continuously, and this village fight formed only a sort of eddy in the struggle separated and set apart from the rest.

(General Drakelin only came to know of this particular phase of the fight, and of the slender chance of victory, at a much later date through the granting of a D.C.M.)

The sergeant still stared through the crevice; but as he did so, he felt that every moment was only rendering the position worse. It was a case of all or nothing, death one way or other. He chose a desperate chance.

He turned and went back to the entrance by which they had come.

Unseen by the enemy, from the side front of the left house, he waved to the lieutenant. Then he instructed his men. Five were to rush furiously across the road

to the openings in the wall of the front house from which the machine-guns fired. Each man was to carry his Mills bomb with the pin already withdrawn. On reaching the front of the house, they were to fling in their bombs. Simultaneously he and other five were to attack the back of the house with bomb and bayonet. They were all to risk the chances of fire from other houses.

He hoped that the lieutenant would lead forward his men at the same moment of attack, and that a few other men still lying near, in holes, would join in.

Altogether he felt it was a mad venture, but what could he do? And madness often pays in war.

Every man being out and ready, he gave the signal. Five men burst out, running low and straight for the front of the house.

The distance was only about twenty yards, and their appearance was unexpected, but a machine-gun rattled fiercely and two men fell. One dragged on to the barricaded doorway at the street entrance of the house. He dropped just about two feet from the door, and with his dying hand he feebly threw his bomb underneath the entrance door. Four seconds later the bomb burst and carved a hole in the entrance. The man who had flung the bomb was already dead.

The second man lay dead in the middle of the road. The clutch of his fingers in death resting on the lever prevented his bomb from bursting.

Other three reached their destination and flung their bombs in or about the openings for the machine-guns. There were more than three guns, and the untouched guns continued to fire, but the effect of the attack was disconcerting, and the main gun covering the advance from the crater was stopped.

Immediately after the bombs burst, the lieutenant

struggled out of the crater and led his men forward by the flank at the same time at which the sergeant rushed for the rear of the house.

The sergeant's line of approach was the most dangerous of all, and he arrived at the back with only one man.

The lieutenant knew nothing of the sergeant's manœuvre, but saw the small door-gap in the wall made by the dead man's bomb. He rushed for that, followed by a sprinkling of men ever growing fewer.

The lieutenant loosened the pin of a bomb as he ran, and flung the bomb well ahead of him into the gap.

He flattened himself against the side of the wall until he heard the bomb burst. Then he dashed in with his revolver, followed by a string of men.

A hand-bomb dropped in front of him, and the lieutenant knew no more of the attack. But the sound of his arrival had reached the sergeant's ears in the shouting and noise, and the lieutenant's appearance had again created a diversion. The sergeant and his men broke through a partition of wood and sandbags, and burst in from the other side yelling tremendously. The sergeant did not go far, but fired his rifle into a group of several men who had turned at his appearance. The attackers on the other side, hastened by the whizzing bullets in the street, were pressing forward in considerable numbers.

The defenders of the house began to believe themselves fighting against enormous odds. On every side they flung down their arms and held up their hands. "Kamerad!"

The fight for these two houses was over, and the sergeant had fifteen prisoners, some wounded. The lieutenant lay wounded inside the house.

The brigade had lost nearly the whole of two bat-

talions owing to the failure of the mine, but the actual outskirts of the village had been taken by a handful of daring men led by an intrepid sergeant.

The sergeant set to work immediately to prepare for the counter-attack. He at the same time sent back a message stating his position and calling for help.

The supporting battalions of the "Tan" Brigade were already creeping forward to assist.

A few hours later they had entered and cleared the village of Danker.

The taking of the outskirts had been the crucial point. Once given the jumping-off place, the rest proved comparatively easy, since British soldiers are efficient users of steel, and the bayonet is not the favourite weapon of the German.

Gruler's Point, two miles away from Danker, was another point where there was trouble.

Retribution for too-loudly-spoken words fell at least on one head rightly. Ample warning had been given of the danger of speaking too loudly, or of speaking on the telephone, on account of the hearing apparatus used by the enemy, but those warnings had not been carried out, with the unfortunate result.

It was Lieutenant Keylane of the "Bush" battalion, commanding B Company, who had used the words, "When we kick off," not knowing that an enemy would hear them ten yards away.

When the great moment came, Keylane was all ready to go over, or kick off as he had expressed it, and the company did so with ready dash.

But they had barely appeared in line before a terrific rattle of machine-gun fire overwhelmed them, and they simply melted away.

The lieutenant himself was among the last to be hit.

In order to see every man up and over, he had remained a little behind, and met the storm of bullets at first with slight cover from men in front, which perhaps saved him for a time.

Anyhow he advanced as far as the farthest.

Then he looked around for his company and his supporters. But there were only two or three solitary stragglers to be seen, moving desolately forward or kneeling and gazing around wonderingly for guidance.

Were they to go on single-handed?

The lieutenant gazed around in amazement.

Even the whizz of bullets, some almost touching his face and passing with cutting noise, did not amaze him so much as this awful absence of men.

He started to yell furiously and wave his rifle and bayonet. "Forward! Forward!" he yelled.

He saw a group of figures lying on the ground to his right. He thought they were lying down taking cover.

"Get up, you men!" he yelled. "Get forward! Get forward!"

Not a man moved.

He staggered across to them. At the same moment he felt a stinging pain in his leg. He reeled, but went on.

When he reached the lying figures, he found they were dead!

For the last time he turned, waved his rifle, and shouted, "Every man, follow me!"

But not a man followed him.

He felt as if he had been struck in the side, and he reeled even more heavily.

The equipment strapped to his back weighed him down. He realised it as a tremendous load, and he determined to get it off.

He dropped his rifle and unloosened the belt. With fearful exertion he got the side straps over his shoulders.

The bullets were still raining past him.

With a last struggle he rolled the equipment off.

Then he muttered, half-unconsciously, " 'Bout time I was looking for a shell-hole."

He saw one two yards ahead, and made for it.

As he did so, he felt as if there was a terrible weight behind him. Unconsciously he thought his leg must be broken or wounded beyond hope. The weight felt so great, he could only drag forward.

At last he reached the shell-hole, and stumbled into it.

After he had lain for a few moments, he turned his head and saw that the terrible weight had been created by the fact that he had not completely disburdened himself of his pack and equipment, but had been dragging it after him through the mud, attached to him by a single strap.

In the midst of the whizzing bullets and thunderous battle, he suddenly laughed a hysteric laugh.

Then he became unconscious.

B Company, "Bush" battalion, had kicked off all right, but had scored no goals.

The officer, who by an unfortunate remark had created the failure, lay severely wounded, and likely to lie there for twelve hours at least with the rest of his company.

Those who were consciously wounded lay in their shell-holes gasping or grimly silent, enduring in mud and cold that froze their very wounds, waiting for night and the stretcher-bearers who would carry them to hospital, or waiting for the death which would carry them elsewhere.

So far as that half of that brigade was concerned, the action was completely finished in half an hour.

They came, they went over—they were no more!

Brigadier Crindle ordered up the left half brigade, and the Division ordered up the supporting brigade.

The corps general co-operated with the divisional general and the artillery commanders, and turned every gun available on to Gruler's Point — and especially the points where the machine-guns were believed to be.

After two hours' bombardment, the order went forth to the artillery: "Repeat infantry barrage, hours to count from 10 A.M. Infantry will renew attack."

They repeated with increased intensity.

The left half brigade went over, and as they went they stepped to victory over the dead men of the right half brigade.

Many men die in war through carelessness or foolishness. Whatever the results of war may be, there can be no question that of all the works of man there is no work known which in its ultimate phase forms so complete a test of efficiency.

The war spirit cries aloud unceasingly—

Be ye efficient, and ye may be spared.

Be ye inefficient, and ye shall certainly suffer.

These test maxims, of course, apply to actual fighting, for only battle puts the matter to proof.

At the point in K square on service map Bayderode 98, a battle was fought on behalf of the infantry, though unknown to them.

The infantry had done their work by taking all the positions ordered, and the scattered few who were left in the front patrols were toiling with spades and sweat of brow to consolidate their posts.

Perhaps these few alone could not have held these posts unaided. Anyhow, Mr Gerling, in sole command

of a large tract of line, was anxious and urging his men on to ever greater exertions, and the men were working wearily but doggedly.

Above them aeroplanes sailed across at great heights from time to time, but the men below scarcely noticed. That was not their business.

It was only the staff, in whose hands were the threads of all the operations, who learned the connection and understood the situation.

At 3.30 P.M. Mr Terne, the observer on the aeroplane observing for the artillery, sent out the emergency call to the artillery, followed by the map reference. That proceeding was repeated.

About a minute later the first shell whizzed over the heads of the toiling infantry. They paid no attention. A shell more or less was nothing to them.

But the shelling increased almost to barrage force. The infantry looked up from their work and wondered. They gazed out ahead, but saw little.

Only Mr Terne above saw that the shelling was accurate, and "let it rip."

When the shelling ceased, in official words, the enemy "had been dispersed by shell fire." In fact the enemy had been caught, and during the shelling dead and dying men strewed the ground, while others flung themselves flat or ran madly to such cover as they could find.

The weary infantry, under Mr Gerling, toiled on with their hasty fortifications, not knowing of the counter-attack which they had been spared owing to the Flying Corps "angel" who had watched over them.

Of the whirling air-fights which were proceeding frequently, the infantry saw but little. The clouds

of air, dust, and smoke of battle, their own constant occupation and difficulties—all these things prevented their seeing very much

Occasionally they saw a plane or several planes who seemed to be fighting. They caught for an instant the flash of a gun. They saw the circling, stalling, and diving of the fighters, and perhaps the last terrific dive of some machine. But it was all over very quickly, and the diggers had no time to think—they must dig on.

Equally the men in the flying-machines, unless specially detailed for observation or contact work, had little time to think of the infantry below. They had their own troubles, the enemy planes, and the shells poured up in profusion by "Archie," not to mention such mere technical matters as "engine trouble."

They saw, indeed, the scarred trenches, the bursting of shells, the cloud and smoke rising at the bursting of a mine, and there passed swiftly under their eyes the constant panorama of tumult, desolation, mud, smoke, and dust-clouded earth; but all that was nothing but passing impression. Their work was to fly each for his own job.

But every man flying on his own allotted task was flying in the common task, and every "gravel-crusher" below, fighting for his own hand, on his allotted task, was fighting for the common cause, for they were all together comprehended and seen as one in the scheme that lay on General Drakelin's table, as elaborated by those below him.

"It is only by the concerted and co-ordinated efforts of every branch of the service that successful results can be obtained."

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The *human* brotherhood of the services is always

found in trouble rising above all professional rivalry where that exists.

When Licutenant Klember, who had been flying "solo" between the lines, was compelled to descend behind his own support infantry lines, men from the trenches carried him off, and handed him over to the medical officer.

As the doctor examined his back and leg, in which there were pieces of shrapnel, Klember said slowly, "I'm awfully sorry to have been compelled to descend behind your support line. I know it's d—d hard lines on the infantry to have the shell fire drawn on to them where the plane falls; but you see, when I got that beastly bit of shrapnel right in the gizzard of my engine, it rather cramped my style, and I had to subside somewhere."

"Oh, don't worry about that," said the doctor cheerfully. "The infantry are probably carrying off souvenirs by now."

"I bet they don't," said the airman. "My poor old bus 'll be shelled to smithereens by this time."

The doctor smiled cheerfully and got on with his work. His business was mending and consoling patients, not arguing on military matters.

CHAPTER XX.

SCATTERED SCENES.

AT Merestrem the fortunes of the day came to depend largely on "simple Rooney."

Simple Rooney had, by one of those happenings remarkable for their scarcity, obtained the job in the army which exactly suited him.

Prior to the war he had been a bird-fancier, and being far from a capable soldier, his company commander had without regret or hesitation placed him on the work of pigeon orderly.

Two pigeons having been supplied to the battalion prior to the push, the simple Rooney, a ramshackle-looking fellow, even after many months of soldiering, went into the battle in charge of these two, and he was as happy on that business as he could have been in any line at all.

His battalion took the objectives they were told to take, but were entirely prevented from communicating with their headquarters or brigade. In the smoke and storm of battle the flash-lamps were useless. Runners dropped out visibly before going any distance. The contact aeroplane, risking too much, came down to earth a sheet of smoke and flame. It lay burning there for a time, and was finally battered to bits by enemy shell fire.

There remained only simple Rooney and his pigeons.

His action in battle was not specially warlike. Indeed, he took no active part. Of course, that was not his work; but it is to be feared that he earnestly desired to be in some better place than the shell-battered world in which he was compelled to be.

He sat in the lowest corner of the deepest hole which he could find. He did not seek to find how the battle was going. He had received no orders as to that. His orders were to wait with the pigeons. He waited.

He sat crouched at the bottom of the hole with the pigeon-box rested on his knees, gazing at the pigeons, which he could see through holes.

His whole soul was with the pigeons, which he loved. They were both of the slate-grey bluish tint in colour, but one of them had a small white mark.

His soul was with the pigeons, but his mind was inevitably drawn by the battle.

He heard the continual bursting of shells in his neighbourhood.

He talked to the pigeons for company.

"Ah, ye're the bonnie birds, ye are! Bonnie, bonnie birds! . . . The fine eyes of you . . . soft little eyes . . . and it's a shame to bring you into the battle, into all this smoke and death and . . . och, sure, it is a shame . . . and yet ye're not frightened at all . . . not a bit of it . . . just proud to be keepin' me company——"

Terrific crash, splinters flying, and earth all around.

"Ochone, that was a bad one. . . . But we've escaped again. . . . And ye're just waitin' . . . quiet and gentle, to fly away with your message. . . . 'Tis a shame to send ye through all that smoke and shell . . . you, with the soft eyes that was meant for peace."

So on he talked until a message dropped at his feet,

flung from an adjoining hole. "Rooney, send that message!"

"Yes, sir," he bawled.

He picked up the tin box in which it was contained. As he was no scholar himself, certain officers had been supplied with a set of materials, and he received a message complete. He had only to attach the cylinder with the message to the bird's leg, and let the bird go.

He hesitated a moment before selecting the pigeon. Finally he chose the one with the white spot.

Before he set the bird free he gazed around at the air above him and the atmosphere of smoke and haze punctuated with columns of black smoke. He waited a few moments, then made up his mind.

He wondered if the bird would be able to fly through all the whizzing shells and bullets. He knew the habits of pigeons well, but he had never used one in a battle before.

He waited till a moment when he thought the battle seemed less fierce.

Then he set the carrier free.

Without the least hesitation the bird with the white spot rose, circled only once, and disappeared into the smoke.

Private Rooney, pigeon-man, gazed after the messenger with painful interest, but from his position he could not see far, and the pigeon was lost almost immediately.

About a quarter of an hour later the bird with the white spot was seen by the pigeon-man at the brigade loft through his glasses. She was coming very slowly through the air and continually dropping nearer to the earth.

By the time she reached the loft the bird had come to the level of her own window, and arrived only by flying horizontally very slowly through the window.

The pigeon entered her cot and the pigeon-man heard the pigeon entry-bell ring.

He went up to cot 22, pigeon Winnie. He found Winnie lying dead on the floor of her cot, one leg was amissing, and there was a wound on the front of her breast.

But the other leg was still there, and the cylinder with the message.

The brigade pigeon-man took the message to the brigade office.

The brigade major knew some of the pigeons by name. "Message, sir, brought in by Winnie—dead."

"Winnie dead!"

"Yes, sir. Shot in the breast, and lost a leg. Fortunately the message was on the other leg."

The major was already immersed in the contents of the message and he only murmured, "How unhappy!"

But later on, after the battle, he heard the whole story, and his praise was just.

"Splendid birds! Absolutely marvellous in their devotion! That was our only communication for hours, and if that bird Winnie hadn't stuck it and come in dying with the message, we'd probably have lost all we gained. The message enabled us to chip in with the supports at the right moment."

About 4 P.M. in the afternoon of the attack Brigadier General Cheminson, commanding "Tin" Brigade, was lying face downwards on the incline of a large shell-hole, his head with steel helmet thereon just raised over the edge of the hole.

His position was a much farther advanced one than his brigadiership perhaps required, but he was a man of energetic soul. Accordingly he was in that position with his legs encased in top-boots, the said boots up

to the ankles being in turn entirely submerged in the water at the bottom of the hole.

His position was uncomfortable, but he thought nothing about that.

His eyes were glued to glasses, through which he was watching operations in front, and at times gazing vaguely backwards.

In front of him, about two hundred yards away, stretched a sluggish muddy stream about twelve feet wide, and treacherous in depth. The edges of the stream were as muddy as its bottom, and there was no foothold.

Troops were lying in holes on both sides of the stream—a few across, more on the brigadier's side.

Brigadier Cheminson muttered to himself incessantly, "My God! Will they never come!" He had sent for them hours before, and yet they were not there, and men were hanging on grimly to what they had gained with the prospect every vanishing minute of having to go back or merely die where they were.

The men he was waiting for were the pioneers, sent for because the only slender piece of bridging that the infantry had been able to create had broken down when only a score of men had crossed and the remainder could not get across.

The Germans had thoughtfully removed all wood and other articles likely to be useful for bridging at that point, and the infantry were entirely dependent on the pioneers coming up.

All this had been foreseen. The stream was on the map and known to be unfordable, and the pioneers had been ordered to come up, but they hadn't come.

"Why? Why?" For the twentieth time the brigadier cursed, and wondered. Messages had been sent back for them too.

At the beginning of the time when the brigadier began to curse, Mr Jenkins several miles away was also using forceful language commiserative of his folly in ever belonging to such a concern as the pioneers. He had received orders from the C.R.E. to be at X. When he was on the point of starting he received orders from Brigadier Cheminson to be at K, a different place entirely—the place of the stream. Now he was under the orders of C.R.E., but specially attached to Brigadier Cheminson's brigade for the battle. The question which he asked, and to which he could get no definite answer from C.R.E.'s office was—which order to obey?

He delayed nearly an hour before obtaining any sort of answer from C.R.E.'s office, and then only from a junior officer did he receive the illuminating communication. "Sorry, old fellow, but can't say whether the one order cancels the other or not. So far as I can see, it won't do a frightful lot of harm even if you don't go to X, but if you don't carry out the brigadier's orders you may get into the soup. May delay things, so if I were you I'd push-off-ski for K, and get there at a comfortable speed."

Mr Jenkins did the "push-off-ski" act, and two hours later than the time which Brigadier Cheminson's ardent soul thought the latest possible hour at which they could arrive, he saw advancing grimly over the shell-holed ground a scattered party of pioneers with picks, shovels, axes, and other tools, and also various timbers and planks.

The sight of the advance appalled the brigadier. It certainly was a queer spectacle—that motley body of men staggering forward into the front of a great battle, loaded up with all manner of impedimenta, creeping slowly forward round shell-holes, now appearing in small

numbers behind a cloud of smoke, and again disappearing, but always getting a little farther forward.

The brigadier wondered if any of them would ever reach the stream. Almost every missile known to war was whizzing over some part of the ground across which they were coming, and their only cover was formed by the clouds of smoke and the general haziness of the atmosphere. That certainly aided them.

It all looked a most unlikely venture, but still they came on, here a few and there small scattered groups creeping up and dragging on the stuff.

The brigadier's interest in the advance was intense. So much depended on its success; but apart from that, the venture was curiously interesting as a speculation in war possibilities. For a few moments that thought even entered the general's mind, and he almost forgot the fact of their lateness, but not for long.

Crash! He saw a shell burst in front of two men bearing some wood, a cloud of smoke and earth rising up, a round pall of black smoke hanging in the air for a time slowly dissolving in mist, and when the smoke had cleared, nothing more to be seen—no more the two men, no more the wood they were carrying, only blank space.

But still the others came on right and left of them, struggling unevenly forward.

Not far from the centre the brigadier saw a figure suddenly wave a stick. "Ah," he muttered. The burly figure was the fellow, the directing mind, in charge of the operation. The general saw the officer waving his stick to certain men who appeared to be helping a wounded man or something of that sort. He appeared to be urging the men on. In his heart the general approved the act. It was no time to delay for wounded or anything else. In his heart, too, the general thought

the leader was cool and resolute in his movements, but always there remained the question—why were he and his men so late? To the general, Mr Jenkins was the man who was late.

The advance seemed to the general to take an age, though he grudgingly admitted to himself that it could not have been any faster.

At last Mr Jenkins was within twenty yards of the general. He was advancing slowly, gazing around him as if in search for what he could not find.

“Here you are!” shouted the brigadier. “Here you are!”

The pioneer officer directed his staggering steps to the general. “Why the —— are you late?”

Mr Jenkins had expected that remark some time, but was not just prepared to receive it at that moment, and he reeled. Unconsciously he reflected for an instant that the general might have been more considerate than to raise a question like that in the middle of the battle, and just when he was about to commence the job.

Mr Jenkins got down into the shell-hole beside the general. “Sir, I only got the order——”

The general, it appeared, did not intend to waste time. “All right!” he shouted. “Daresay it wasn’t your fault. We’ll inquire later, but now get on. There’s the river ——” waving his hand ahead. “Get a bridge of some kind across it as fast as possible, so that men can be dribbled over to support the others. Then make half a dozen more bridges and bigger ones, and work like hell. That’s all. Get on! Every minute counts.”

“Yes, sir.”

Mr Jenkins never saw that brigadier again, but he retained for the rest of his life a vision of a general with a pair of field-glasses in his hand, his tin helmet askew on his head, a grim bronzed face spattered with mud,

fierce staring eyes and haggard expression, box respirator hanging underneath his chin, and the whole man lying huddled on the edge of that crater-hole. To the pioneer that vision remained as a picture of grim determination and savage war.

After saying "Yes, sir," Mr Jenkins left the shell-hole and advanced all his men and material nearer the stream. He disposed the men in shell-holes until the moment when they were required to advance to the edge of the stream. In the shell-holes they proceeded to do some simple preparatory works of bridge-building. Mr Jenkins had received a note of approximate data relating to the stream before coming up, and accordingly was able to proceed by anticipation, praying fervently that the work might not prove to be in vain when the bridges did come to be thrown across. If the current of the stream were more rapid than he had been led to expect, if the bottom proved too utterly treacherous and sinking, his first plan of meeting the situation might prove quite useless. The amount of wood which had survived the advance was comparatively limited, and though he had not said so, he thought the general would be lucky if he got three moderate-sized bridges. (As the result of considerable experience of war, Mr Jenkins thought it undesirable to mention that, because he had learned that it was not wise to disappoint the hopes of generals by anticipating trouble.)

But these were all mere engineering problems, quite apart from the fact that whenever they tried to make the bridges, the enemy from somewhere would probably turn a machine-gun on the workers, or perhaps shell them.

For one instant only there flashed across the mind of Mr Jenkins, even in the midst of personal labour and direction in the middle of a great battle, the picture of the

wisp of a girl in white. She was sitting at home with infinite faith in him, believing that he was doing his duty. He was one of those stout-built romantic fellows, and she was a fortifying thought to him.

The picture went as quickly as it came. And the stoutish figure of Mr Jenkins kept working on.

In ten minutes' time the leading men of the first bridge party were creeping forward, running as low as possible. As they did so, the soul of Mr Jenkins was revived indeed, for the mist of battle, the mist created by the weather, had combined with smoke to create almost a fog, which enabled his men to advance with a reasonable chance of success.

Mr Jenkins said fervently, "Thank God!" Some vague remnant of Old Testament wording came to him: "And the Lord sent a mist." He felt as if that was what had happened.

But that was only Mr Jenkins' point of view, because it suited his bridging. At other parts men were cursing the mist and accompanying drizzle which had started to fall, and saying, "It's only our —— luck. We never have any luck."

Such is war, for what suits one part of the battle may be certainly disastrous to another.

Under cover of the mist Mr Jenkins' men stole forward, slipped those light trestles in, and got their planks across. Very shortly after, the first of the infantry, who had been lying on the near bank, were stealing across the bridge, slipping over during lulls in machine-gun fire.

When the bridges were completed, Mr Jenkins withdrew all that were left of his men, and returned to billets to sleep. The work he had begun was carried on by other pioneers during the night.

Only two bridges remained, one partly damaged when

the night-workers arrived. The rest had been destroyed by casual shell-fire.

During the whole night men, rations, ammunition, bombs, wood, and stores of all kinds continued to stream up to that deadly place, and men continued to file across those bridges in the intervals between the fall of the Very lights and the rise of the next. But though the lights went down the machine-guns and rifles rattled continuously, spraying bullets across the stream.

The planking of the bridges became slippery with the mud left by many feet, and in their haste men encumbered with many burdens, and not seeing well in the darkness, reeled, slithered, and capsized helplessly into the muddy stream. Once there, they were too heavily weighted to rise. Others were shot in crossing and fell over dead.

But still men continued to rush over. The rushing, however, grew slower and slower on account of the danger of the crossing, until it was finally reduced to a walk.

And an N.C.O. was placed in a shell-hole near the commencement of each bridge to give the command, "Walk, walk!"

The N.C.O. at the third bridge saw a man come up to go across. He shouted the command and the man walked. Midway across he either slipped or was shot, and toppled over.

Another man was coming behind and shouted as the man fell, "Aw, Willie!"

At the same moment the man rushed on to the bridge and somehow lay down.

A moment later the corporal in the hole heard a voice. "Help us here! Help us here! I've got him."

The corporal was ordered to remain in the hole shouting "Walk!" But at the same time he felt he would

have ceased to be a man if he had not responded to the call. So he rose and went to help.

He got on to the bridge and was stooping down carefully to find out how he could help, when a bullet struck him, and he too tumbled into the stream to rise no more.

The fall of the corporal weighted the man below, and the second man lying flat on the bridge lost his hold of his companion.

The second man made a wild effort to seize him again, but could not.

When he realised the situation the second man lay on the bridge heeding neither shells nor bullets. He had lost his friend who had been with him all through the war.

He lay sobbing.

War is very pitiless.

The man lying on the bridge was ordered to get up and get on. When he had done so more men got across, and another corporal was placed in the shell-hole to shout "Walk!" He was ordered to remain at his post whether every man who attempted to cross was drowned or not.

By the following morning a report was in the hands of Colonel Berdelin to the effect that the —— river had been crossed and a position consolidated three hundred yards across the farther bank.

After the report had gone in that that position across the stream had been consolidated, an artillery brigadier entered the signalling office of the infantry brigade. His own particular hole a few yards away had been blown up while he was absent.

The brigadier's eyes were bloodshot. He was unshaven and covered with mud. When he entered he saw some mugs standing on a table and a kettle on a

small fire. "Any tea here?" He sat down wearily as he spoke.

"Yes, sir."

A signaller brought him a mug of tea. The brigadier gulped it down. Then he saw a mattress bed.

He rose and rolled towards it. "I dunno whose bed this is," he said, "but, I've had no sleep for forty-eight hours and I must have a rest. Wake me in an hour's time, d'ye hear?"

"Yes, sir."

The brigadier flung himself on the bed in his top-boots just as he was, and fell asleep.

The signalling officer came in about ten minutes' later, with his mind also on sleep.

When he saw some one in his bed he shouted, "Here, I say, what sod's that in my bed?"

"It's the artillery general, sir. Said he'd had no sleep for forty-eight hours."

The signalling officer heaved an infuriated sigh. "Why the blazes can't he sleep in his own bed? I've had no sleep for *sixty* hours. Suppose I'll have to doss down on the floor because of him! . . . How can a man live if any old general's going to come in and seize his bed at any time!"

The signalling officer had perforce to doss down. The general, unaware of his misdeeds, slept peacefully on while the battle raged, and the raging signalling officer slept on the floor below.

They were both wakened an hour afterwards. When the general saw the signalling officer he said, "'Fraid I've taken your bed."

"Oh, it's quite all right, sir," said the signalling officer. But inwardly he thought otherwise. One of the solvents of army life is disciplined statement.

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The least successful part of the first day's battle took place at Cinder Mount.

It was there that a party of Colonel Bardelaine's battalion covered themselves with glory.

The advance at that part was at first very successful. Positions one and two were taken without difficulty, but the third and last position behind Cinder Mount was not taken that day.

Cinder Mount was a low rising ground, and on account of the nature of the ground and the defensive position taken up by the Hun in rear of this rising the enemy had not suffered there to the same extent from artillery fire. The result was that the enemy retained there a line of trench with many machine-guns which swept the crest of the rising called Cinder Mount, and any attempt to move across the top was rendered wellnigh impossible.

The Rokeshires accordingly lay on one side of the crest with little cover, while the Hun lay on the other well protected, and with many men in waiting in underground dug-outs.

Hour by hour they hung on watching and waiting. Stray bullets coming from the flanks pattered over them intermittently, and men dared to move but little. They only eased their positions from time to time, and strove to raise themselves from slipping back in holes or sinking more deeply in the mud.

They were entirely without cover except against direct frontal fire, and as the afternoon dragged on the enemy began to pour across a steady stream of bombs. Howitzer fire also began to break over them.

The fire and bombing increased in intensity about 3.30 P.M. They had then been lying there over six hours, and men were waiting in mute agony, wishing before all things that the night would come. At intervals during the day, men had tried to clean the bolts

of their rifles. But the mud and dirt of the struggle they had come through had covered their clothes, their hands, and their rifles, all with damp filth, that seemed to be made of glue. Every turn they made covered some other part of them with the clinging ooze, and their fingers, stiff with cold, and grimy with sweat and damp congealed in mud, soiled everything they touched. They wiped their hands on their tunics to clean the mud from their hands, and they found their hands no cleaner than before. With those cold grimy fingers they tried to work their bolts backwards and forwards in their rifles, but they only worked slowly through grit and mud sticking over them. Some took their bolts out to clean them, but cleaning under these conditions was almost worse than none. As the day wore on, and men kept their rifles in position to fire against the counter-attack, when it came, the damp in the atmosphere combined with all the other forces to decrease the possibilities of working those bolts and getting those rifles to fire.

At 4.30, men were lying in the mud with rifles, the majority of which could not fire at all. When the artillery fire directed against them began to increase in volume, the artillery acting in support of the advance endeavoured to assist by opening a counter-fire.

What the value of that fire was, the men lying there knew not. It appeared to decrease nothing of the violence of the enemy fire.

But a terrible thing happened. Shells fired from their own artillery, and intended to strike the enemy, began to drop in the midst of them, and men began to die by the fire of their own friends.

One of the guns, whether through some miscalculation, or because the bore had become too worn for service, was shooting short and striking them in the

back, and they had no means of communicating to the artillery what was happening.

It was the last straw.

Whizz! whizz! The rightly directed shells hissed over their heads to the proper destination. Bang! Crash! Right in the middle of them fell the shells of the gun shooting short.

Men who had held up all day with unbroken courage almost wept. To have fought as they had fought, to have held on as they had held, only to be killed by their own side.

Shell fire is always terrible, and death is only death from any quarter, but yet there is something terrible in lying waiting to be killed by your own friends.

Crash! Every four rounds that short falling shell burst.

"Oh God!" Men moaned and hugged the ground, yet they must lie there and wait for death.

Colonel Bardelaine made up his mind to withdraw two hundred yards. Word was passed along, and it reached "Tiny" Mildred, the youngest subaltern in the battalion, and at the moment the foremost officer left lying there.

He was a pretty boy, just nineteen, called "Tiny" because he was so large, six feet two, with remarkable breadth and strength.

Tiny was ordered to cover the withdrawal with thirty men.

Whether the retirement was the signal for the German attack, or whether a counter-attack was launched at the identical moment, was never known, but the fact is that the enemy burst from their trenches just as men began to creep back.

A single man lying nearest the top of the crest saw them rising out of the ground, and shouted back.

When Tiny saw the signal and knew that his work of covering the retirement was to be no matter of form, he did what his nature taught him to do.

He knew that not a rifle would fire, so he took off his respirator from his neck and his equipment from his shoulders. He stood up that every man of his could see, and signalled to them. He took off his tunic, then he seized his rifle and bayonet, and stood ready in his shirt sleeves.

Every other man of his thirty took off their equipment and respirators, and took their rifles in their hands, and there was no man there but knew that that struggle would be their last.

When the first of the enemy appeared at the crest, Tiny charged. It was only a case of twenty yards' run, then cut, thrust, pull out, jab, stroke with the butt, crash, crash, groan, yell, so on went the desperate fight of thirty sweating, gasping, furious men against hundreds.

Tiny and his thirty shrieked and yelled, strove and hacked, fought and swore terribly with the savage fury of men mad with their last madness. They literally hurled the advancing line reeling backwards down the slope, but one by one they died, and the nearer the trench they came, the more of them fell by the bullets of those hidden foes who faced no steel, but fired steadily behind cover.

Tiny himself fought with no regulation bayonet strokes, but with his great strength he hurled men back till they fled before him. His bayonet stuck and was lost, but he carried on with the rifle, whirling it as a flail that swept down men like sheaves.

But death came to him as to all the men who did their duty, and covered the men who were ordered to withdraw.

Tiny was gloriously strong and glorious in death, but to his brother officers he had often said that he never cared for killing other people at all. He only did it as a duty. That kind are among the most terrible in battle.

It was perhaps only in these last moments of enormous odds that Private Sugged, one of Tiny's men, fully realised the value of the training he had received at the base from the bayonet-fighting instructors, especially Sergeant Cranther, the ironic.

Sugged was a man of sluggish mind and habit, to whom the fierce exertions of bayonet-fighting, as taught by the sergeant, had appealed but little, and the sergeant had expended considerable fierce invective and savage irony upon the slow-moving private.

Perhaps at the last Sugged remembered the day when the sergeant, roused almost to a passion of indignation (because he was a man of enthusiasm in his work), had spoken to him first in soft, pipingly ironic accents, in a quotation from a hymn—

“Aw, gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Take me like a little child!”

The sergeant had paused for a moment, and then burst forth in a growing fury of words.

“Is that how you meet a German—with open hands and smiling face, asking him to let you pass, or not to kill you perhaps? Is that how you meet him?”

At the fierce inquiry, Sugged had stared dumbly.

“Man, I tell you, you're training for war, *war*, bloody war. They'll kill you, murder you, shoot you, stab you in the back, butcher, slaughter, do anything on God's earth to do you in . . . and you . . . you're to go up like that holding your rifle like an old wife's gamp!”

The sergeant's voice had been poignant with the irony of it. He had continued the process. "I suppose you think you're to go up to them and go through the operations of 'standing—load,' or getting into the 'on guard' position, and then get an order from an officer for the next act."

Sugged had meekly intimated that he scarcely expected to go that length. The sergeant had resumed in serious vein. "Well, pull yourself together, man; grasp your rifle like a vice; put on a face that would frighten the devil himself, and roar as you thrust! That's how to fight!"

Sugged went down roaring magnificently. He had realised in time to make a great finish.

While Tiny and Sugged were dying, and a brigadier sleeping, pioneers bridging, and infantry lying in thousands along miles of line of captured ground, hanging on grimly to what they had got, the roads behind were still choked with traffic, trains were running ceaselessly from every part of France, and divisions were marching from camp to camp just as the Grampian Division had done. And more shells and guns and mortars were pouring up.

All that represented the second coming of men, those who were to replace the men of the first round and carry on the second phase of the great push.

CHAPTER XXI.

STILL THEY SMILE.

As the battle proceeded, more and more the ground for many miles came to be dotted sparsely over, or in places thickly strewn with figures, some motionless and pathetic in their stillness, others moving just a little from time to time.

Those wounded who were able to do so, took cover in any shell-hole they could find, but cover often meant a sliding bank of mud terminating in a pool of muddy water ; and men, wounded perhaps in one arm, hung on wearily by the other to the edge of the crater-holes in which they were hidden, hung on until they were picked up by the bearers, or else slipped and slipped until, no longer able to retain consciousness, they finally slid into the water, where they lay in dreadful cold and misery. Perhaps the cold of the water roused them, and they struggled feebly up, or perhaps they sank beyond hope.

It is a dreadful thing to endure slow cold misery with consciousness still active and the physical frame helpless to avert the evil.

But that is what it is to be wounded in a great battle.

The rattle and roar of the battle goes on. Shells burst crashing around and hiss overhead, shrapnel crackles above, bullets whiz past, smoke floats slowly

around, stench gathers and increases with sickening force, and the victim lies helpless hour on hour, waiting—waiting—wondering, will they never come?

Sergeant Peake told his story after he came out of the battle and was resting in hospital. He said:—

“I was hit in the arm and leg and was unable to move from where I was. I just managed to get on to a sort of ledge which put a furrow of earth in front of me. I got stuck on the ledge and was afraid to fall off for fear of hurting my arm worse than it was, as if I had fallen I would have been unable to prevent my body from dropping on top of it. While I lay there I unfortunately got stuck in a position face upwards, and so I saw all that was going on around. For a while there was a fight between our men and the Germans. They (the Germans) came on and passed over me, but I lay quite still and they took no notice of me. After a while the Germans came back running, and a number of them were hit and dropped near me. One man started to groan, and continued to moan horribly for hours after, until I think he died. After that they continued to fight round about me, and shooting went on from both sides. I think German snipers remained in front of me. By that time I think I was half delirious and muttering with the pain of lying in one position from which I could not move. Also the guns of one side or the other were bursting shrapnel right above, and I could not help seeing the flashes, and every burst seemed to be sending the shrapnel right down on me. It felt horrible, and I know I was shivering all over with cold or horror. It was terrible. I never minded battle before, but I think these were the worst twelve hours of my life. It was the feeling of being utterly helpless, and anybody or anything could hit me, and I could do nothing.

"Some time in the night stretcher-bearers came and took me away. I suppose they heard me muttering. Anyhow, they found me. I am sure that the snipers fired at them, because I felt the bullets whizzing over me, but I don't remember anything else!"

The stretcher-bearers and a party of searchers from the battalion had actually come to look for Lieutenant Marcus of the same battalion, whom report had stated to be lying there wounded.

When the party arrived on the battlefield it was then evening. The extraordinariness of war and battle can never be illustrated better perhaps than by the proceedings of this party.

Eight stalwart fellows they were from the —— battalion. They had come up difficult and crowded roads and had crossed the battlefield to this very advanced point, where they were surrounded to a considerable extent by Hun snipers, not to mention the Hun line farther off. When they arrived artillery fire had died down to some extent at that point, and bullets were not very plentiful, but still there was plenty of danger.

Did they take any account of that?

Answer—No.

The party strolled about the battlefield searching for their officer, talking to themselves and calling out—

"Are there ony —— officers lyin' aboot here? . . . Well, he's no here. . . . Better go over there. . . . Aw, ye'll maybe get killed if ye do. . . . Here's a helmet soovencer. . . . It's a good one. Aa'll take that down with me. . . . Aw, here he is! Come on wi' the stretcher. This is no' a canny spot."

Whizz! A bullet travels past the speaker's ears. "Aw, the —— ——, they're shootin' at us, though they

ken fine we're wi' the Red Cross. . . . Come on, quick wi' the bandages. Here he is. . . .

"Aye. Yes, sir. It's us. Ye'll be all right in a wee while, sir. Yes, sir."

Some elementary bandaging is done, and then the party erects Lieutenant Marcus on the stretcher and move off.

They stagger down over shell-holes and slippery paths and boards until they come to the first station, where they deposit their burden.

As they go down, their numbers are gradually augmented by men with helmets on and helmets off; men with bandages round their heads, round their arms, round their legs; men with their arms inside their tunic sleeves and outside them, and men without tunics at all. Some come limping, some come staggering, some come alone, some come leaning on each other's shoulders, some look round with the grim smile of victory, others gaze about them with the weary vacancy of tortured exhaustion.

All bear one common aspect of muddiness, grime, and ragged dishevelment, and all must arrive by the same troublous roads along which many, once wounded, fall out wounded again, or fall out for the last time.

Along with the wounded come a few with no visible signs of wounding. These are the gas and shell-shock cases.

Their path is not always easy, for no man fit to fight retires from battle by the simple method of going home. That was possible in days when men fought on gentlemanly lines, and persons who had not cut their corn, when they thought it convenient went away to do so.

Not so is the modern way.

"Well, my man, what's the matter with you?"

"Shell-shock, sir."

"Shell-shock? Don't see much sign of it. You look well enough. What do you feel like?"

"Oh, I feel bad, sir."

"Sort of sinking feeling in your boots?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yes; all right. But we all have that going into battle for the first time. Just make up your mind, and you'll find there's nothing the matter with you. What's your battalion?"

"10th ——."

"10th ——? I see. Where are they? . . . You don't know. Where did you lose them? . . . You don't know. . . . Well, it doesn't matter. They're badly needing supplies up where you came from. You'll find a box of ammunition there. Take it and join the party under Sergeant Brittle over there, and he'll lead you up into the battle again. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. March off."

The shell-shock case joins Sergeant Brittle with the other stragglers, preparatory to a renewed waging of war. He will, at all events, contribute the carriage of a box of ammunition as his share in the great push.

As the day wears on, the first-aid posts become ever busier, and men lie alongside on stretchers by the dozen. Some posts are (with luck) directly connected with ambulance cars, others are connected by light railways and the stretchers are sent down on trucks, and some are not connected at all, and the result is immense additional work on bearers.

Car No. 864 was working between the end of the

line, connecting post at M—— with the casualty clearing station. Six hours after he was carried off the battlefield, Lieutenant Marcus was sent down on the light railway and placed in 864 with three others.

Then began the journey to the C.C.S.

Marcus was suffering severely, and felt the painfulness and slowness of the journey badly; but at the same time his risible faculties were tickled, despite the seriousness of the work, by the extraordinary nature of the journey.

The roads were choked with ambulance cars, transport, and men coming up and down, and the roads were very rough.

The consequence was severe jolting.

When the journey started, at the first jolt one man groaned a prolonged "O-o-o-oh!"

At the second jolt another man gave a minor groan. At the third he joined full blast.

At the fourth jolt the third man joined in the chorus.

At the fifth and succeeding jolts there was a full-blooded chorus of apparently fairly lusty wounded men, each roaring in crescendo, "O-o-o-oh!"

Marcus felt pained too, but he said in his heart, "I'm d—d if I'll groan!"

But in his shaken and half-hysteric condition, produced by loss of blood, he laughed silently at the extraordinary chorus mingled with the drone of the engine of the car and the constant rumbling of traffic passing along. As they drew farther away from the battle, an occasional snatch of song floated to them from passing troops—the men who were going up for the next round.

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After an exceedingly slow journey, lasting about two hours, the car drew up at the C.C.S. Lieutenant Marcus was carried into the main tent, where Maisie Herbert was working with her sleeves tucked up to the elbow.

He was laid on the floor on the stretcher, because all the beds were already taken up, and beside him were lines of men with all sorts of wounds, all lying on stretchers.

The matron and the nurses were working at high pressure, as also were the doctors. These were the days of desperation for them, when night was turned into day and day into night, and the wounded poured down in ceaseless stream.

Despite checks in different places, the battle was going well; but for all that there was a great price to pay, and it was the people in the hospitals to whom the price was most clearly brought home.

Maisie Herbert was engaged in the immediate work of attending to those just coming in, and she moved about from one to another, directing bearers, allotting places, and tending the wounded.

The pressure was very severe, and she turned from time to time to the matron for direction. The matron was always cool, and the more numerous the wounded who came in, the more serene if anything she appeared to become.

The great marquees were packed to overflowing, and it was undesirable to put wounded outside, as the incessant traffic had reduced the ground around the C.C.S. to the prevailing state of mud.

An ambulance train, it appeared, had been delayed, and consequently there was no means of removing the lighter cases. Fortunately the train came in just as matters were becoming desperate.

Immediately the procession of stretcher-bearers started again. The lightly wounded walked to the train, and those on stretchers were lifted in. Immediately after the work of loading was complete the train moved out and another came in.

So was the C.C.S. kept clear.

But before the clearance took place, doctors worked incessantly, injecting and bandaging and operating.

A few wounded here and there groaned at times, or talked in delirium, but the majority stolidly waited their turn of treatment, or silently endured after-treatment until they were removed to the train.

Amid it all, doctors and nurses moved about with amazing coolness.

A little hurried they were, perhaps, those nurses, but they had still time to say a kindly word.

As Marcus lay there, Maisie Herbert came to him. "You are wounded in the arm?"

"Yes."

"Ah. You would like something to drink. Yes . . . A little of this will do you good. . . . Your arm was bandaged at the aid post. I'll just look at the bandage. It seems all right. The doctor 'll see you in a minute."

So she went from patient to patient. Her face was pale, as were the faces of most of the nurses, with the weariness of incessant work of the most wearing type, and she, whose fingers were gentle, had known them dipped in the blood of men, and holding limbs that were mangled and broken. She had seen many of the most terrible sights of war, and yet she still smiled her kindly smile to every patient. Perhaps the smile was more wan and ghostly in these days of the great push, but it was undoubtedly still there.

She was only one of those wonderful women who, at their greatest, are magnificently great.

Of course, the effect of so much experience of wounds and death is in part neutralising. As one remarked, "I used to suffer and cry in the first days. But what's the use? The war goes on. My tears do no good. We can only work and do our best to make them better again. Besides, the men prefer us to be cheery."

And it is so. The philosophy of the war has become common to both sexes. It is shouted up and down the roads as the troops pass by, and weary nurses echo it in their souls, and even murmur it to their patients—

"What's the use of worrying,
It never is worth while ;
Pack up troubles in your old kit-bag,
And smile, smile, smile."

Or—

"Place your money in the new War Loan,
And smile, smile, smile."

An aggravating song in some respects, but undoubtedly the philosophy of the war among the combatant forces is in favour of non-worrying principles.

Maisie Herbert in these days met many difficulties, but perhaps none was more peculiar than the case of the subaltern whom she had met at the station some months before on her first coming to the C.C.S.

It was nothing singular that he should come through the C.C.S., because he had been in that district and in the fighting since it began.

But it was his action which attracted her attention.

When he arrived she examined his wounds, and found that he was hit in both arm and leg. She did all she could for him and then left him.

After that she was very busy, and had no time to attend him. As the hours went by he slept fitfully,

but when not sleeping found his sole occupation in watching her as she flitted about the tent.

Once, during a momentary pause in her duties, she happened to be standing near him, and reflecting that he had got very little attention, she went up to him. "Is there anything I can do for you?" she inquired kindly.

He moved his head as if to speak. She thought his voice had grown weak, and bent down her head towards his. "If I recover from these wounds," he said, "will you marry me?"

For a single instant she involuntarily stared at him in amazement, but he was quite serious. Then she raised herself to an erect position again, and with her hands half spread out at her sides, as if to indicate the immensity of the work around, looked at him with a face which clearly said, "Is there any limit on earth to the sheer unreasonableness of man?"

The wounded indomitable gazed at her solemnly until she rushed away. After a time he reflected that he had been an ass to propose just then, but he was not too depressed, because at least he was not rejected.

During a day that he remained there, he continued to watch her with a smile on his face, but she rather avoided him. There was too much inquiry in his eyes.

At the end of the day, much to his disgust, they carried him away from the C.C.S. and limited comforts, with Maisie, to the base hospital and unlimited comfort, excluding Miss Herbert. He undoubtedly preferred chlorinated tea and biscuit, with love, to the fat of the land without her.

As he went away he was still unreasonable. He whispered, "You haven't answered my question?"

"Do be sensible," she murmured. "Take care of

yourself, and write me a letter if you will when you're better." As he went away, she smiled to him very gently, with a queer look in her eyes.

Her mind was perplexed between the unreasonable-ness of his proceedings, and, on the other hand, the gameness of his thoughts in expecting so certainly to recover from two dreadful wounds, and in daring to think of proposing under these conditions.

Not all the problems of nurses come under the head of nursing. Perhaps Colonel Berdelin would not have been surprised at this happening, because it was one of his maxims that war was an affair of the unexpected.

CHAPTER XXII.

HORSE.

AT 1.15 P.M. on the second day of the great push the cavalry lying behind Chicory Wood had not the least expectation of coming into action, and they were accordingly not in any way hurrying their midday nourishment.

However, they were well prepared to get into action at any moment if it appeared that that was necessary, for the men and horses had twice been practised in the business of getting to their prearranged positions if immediate action of any kind should chance to be ordered.

One squadron of horses was picketed in a sunken road, partly camouflaged, and they were extraordinarily well concealed. But other squadrons could not be so well hidden. However, the air service had promised special protection against enemy observation, and they had done their job well. Or at all events no enemy aeroplanes had been seen above the cavalry, and there had actually been no casualties, so that things looked well for the cavalry.

The general commanding, however, was full of apprehension as time went by. The longer they remained in that place the more probable it seemed to him were the chances of discovery, and if they really were spotted, he rather thought there would be mighty few cavalry left

in view of the way they were packed behind the only available cover.

When the chance came, therefore, orders were issued at the earliest moment, and the whole got into motion at the double.

Two regiments of regulars were just a shade smarter than a regiment of irregular horse, and sergeants in the latter went about cursing profusely. "Get done with that —— feeding and get those horses saddled. . . . Get on there. . . . Get done with it!"

And men who were still doubtful of the possibility of their getting a run for their money muttered to themselves without enthusiasm, "——! How many times have we saddled up these ruddy horses and put all their —— ironmongery on, and never got no farther than sittin' on our fundamentals catchin' cold. . . . A muzzy chance we have, and no mistake."

Officers not being then obsessed with the task of saddling up, moved about with almost equally cynical expectations.

Mr Jarvis smiled to his neighbouring troop commander and murmured, "What a hope!"

Eventually they were all saddled up, with their nose-bags, respirators, and other implements of war hung about them, and they positively moved off.

Men then began to look around and ahead. It certainly seemed as if something were going to happen.

But their hopes even then were small.

"Goin' to do a —— fox-'untin' turn over the —— barbed wire. . . . There'll be a'ell of a lot o' broken legs over those —— trenches if there ain't no other casualties. The last time the 'Charge (I don't thinks)' got this length, they lost half their —— horses with broken legs and barbed wire in their guts."

But these pessimists, well justified though they might

be from previous experience, were doomed to disappointment and favoured to obtain a chance of glory.

The pessimists did not know that Colonel Berdelin was sitting with a plan in front of him and a sculptured image of the ground, and that he, the brain of the army, knew perfectly well that the cavalry were going through at that point. The pessimists did not know that the movement had been prepared for and expected, and that the pioneers and many infantry carriers had been up and were ahead of them bridging those very places, the like of which had brought disaster to the "Charge (I don't think) Hussars."

Yet it was so.

"Trot!" sounded the command.

"Trot!" ran down the line, and a few moments after starting squadron after squadron were moving along different roads and across open fields at a smart trot.

The horses were in excellent condition. Mr Jarvis, mounted on a neat-stepping and well-bred mare, moved across the field at a trot that continually threatened to break into a canter. The mare carried him forward with ease and grace, and seemed to know that battle was afoot and be eager to get into it. She spurned tin cans with her heels, shook her head, and snorted from time to time as if the very breath of war had entered her spirit.

Jarvis himself felt exhilarated, and they worked together as one. Both master and mare were ready for the fray. Perhaps they both realised that it was absolutely the chance of a lifetime.

But the farther they advanced the worse the going became, and the pace grew slower again. Also the horses had to turn and twist this way and that to avoid holes and scattered impediments.

Whiz! whiz! whiz!

The inevitable had happened. Their luck could not last for ever. Even with all the smoke and dust of battle that was still hanging about, and the general haze in the atmosphere, those strings of horsemen were bound to be seen and shelled. And they were.

At the moment when the shelling commenced they had reached the first line of trenches requiring to be crossed.

Many of the horses were excited, and the thing could not be done in a moment. It was impossible to rush the thing. The ground was too utterly rubbish-strewn, sinking, and uncertain. Rushing meant broken legs. Going too slow meant risk of being shot on the top line of the parapet.

They could only do their "damnedest." So up the horses clambered, picking their way on the crumbling parados. A moment's halt on unsteady ground followed, succeeded by a standing jump on to the remains of an equally shattered parapet, and the jump under these conditions was not so very insignificant. However, the pioneers had thought it unnecessary to provide bridges there, because they had so much more to do ahead.

Jarvis felt his mare trembling under him with excitement before she took the standing bound. But once over, she was all for getting forward again.

The troop was now in open formation, and Jarvis waited until they were all over. Only one horse, struck by a bullet, leapt half in the air, shook there an instant, and then hurled both itself and the rider into the bottom of the trench, where they lay horribly entangled.

Jarvis knew the man—"big Littlejohn"—and despite the excitement of the moment, unconsciously realised a thrill of horror.

But there was no time for thrills of horror. The thrill and call of the game was too desperate.

On again, dragging those hoofs at every step out of sinking clammy ground. The pride of the charge was all gone, and the slowness of the work chafed the eagerness of both horses and men.

Still they struggled forward. They passed through remains of enemy wire, and troopers cursed from the bottom of their souls. Men had to dismount to clear a path in places, and the delay was horrible. In the souls of the pessimists it seemed as if all their prognostications of evil were about to come true.

In places the horses had to be led through lanes in the wire, and the more the lanes were used, the more dangerous they became. The infantry, of course, had passed these places, but what was good enough to let infantry through was short commons for cavalry. The infantry had had enough to do to attend to their own troubles. If here and there they had lifted a piece of wire, got through, and then in their hurry allowed it to curl back, how were they to know that horses were coming after? The rank and file did not know anyhow.

The longer the delay, the more men and horses dropped.

But once through the wire, the pioneers had started their job, and there were bridges across the first large enemy trench. It was seven feet wide at the top, with treacherous heavily-shelled ground, and collapse in many places.

The bridges were no slighting comment on the horsemanship of the cavalry. They were absolutely required, for no hunting county, even cursed with barbed wire, ever equalled the extraordinary difficulties of this hunt.

The going had been very bad, but the bridges put new heart into the men. For the first time it dawned on men that perhaps this was no hastily gathered rush,

but part of a carefully designed plan, which had been prepared for.

The horses trotted over the bridges rapidly, and spread out again. There was something steadying about the sharp blow of the hoofs on the wooden bridges, and beyond the bridges the going was better.

The only worse feature was that every here and there the ground was strewn with dead infantrymen, or wounded men who gazed wonderingly at the cavalry passing by.

At last they came to the front line of the infantry advance. There the infantry officers were adjuring their men to work, but no officers could stop the labouring infantry from gazing for a moment at one of the wonder spectacles of the war.

To the infantry as well as to the cavalry it seemed the dawn of a new era, and nothing on earth could restrain them. For a moment weary men rested their spades and shovels, and turned to shout and yell, a medley of wild cries and hoarsely furious enthusiasm. "Go on the cavalry! Go it! Go it! Cut the — down!"

As line after line of cavalry struggled forward, infantrymen rushed forward here and there to help stray horsemen in difficulties, to tear aside an obstacle, or give a friendly pull. And enthusiasm rose wilder and wilder. Officers no longer made an effort to check the cheering, and cries resounded all around. "Do it on them, boys! Put it across them! Give them hell!"

To the infantry it seemed as if at last their day had come. For all the mauling and shelling they had had, it was their simple faith that a day of retribution on the creators of it all would surely come. And it looked as if the day were actually at hand, and they were proud and happy, who had helped to bring it about,

and who were to be in at the death for that battle at least.

There was even joking too. "Good old cavalry! Go on! If ye do it this time, we'll forget the time ye've been awa'!"

The cavalry ploughed grimly through, though men smiled here and there, and muttered, "We'll do it, if we get our chanct."

Some of the hardest-bitten fellows in the British Army were going over on these horses, but they said little.

They passed the leading line of infantry. Jarvis's troop, about fifty yards farther on, came under machine-gun fire when near a low mound. He gave something like an inarticulate yell, waved his hand, and made for the mound. Half a dozen men and horses were dropped, kicking and struggling in the mud. The remainder galloped madly for the shelter of the mound—"galloped" despite the dangerous nature of the ground. The excellent condition of the horses alone permitted them to make those bounds over considerable craters which one or two achieved. Not all, however. Two or three leapt short, and struggled desperately, with straining backs and plunging feet, to get clear.

At the mound Jarvis shouted again.

"Dismount! Horse-holders!"

All that were left of the troop dismounted hastily. Horse-holders took the horses and drew as well as possible out of the line of fire. The remainder of the men lay down, and Jarvis set to work furiously to consider how that gun was to be outed. At the same time, at the back of his mind was a deadly fear that all the horses would be killed by shell fire before they could move from the place. Meantime, despite the noise of battle, the horses were quiet enough.

Fortunately, much thought was not required of him. The noises of battle were considerable, and one bang more or less hardly attracted attention; but as he lay thinking he chanced to look up, and saw a small black-pointed thing moving from behind through the air towards that machine-gun hole, then more black things. Bang! Bang! Bang!

There was a regular barrage of them.

"Thank God! The Stokes gunners are on to them!" Mr Jarvis was fervently thankful. How he came to be so supported he did not know. He was quite unaware that a memorandum had been issued to persons in authority to the effect that on account of previous delays it was desirable that cavalry, at least in the earlier stages, and if at all possible, should be supported by Stokes mortars. He was quite unaware that an enthusiastic Stokes gunner officer had advanced his guns in support of the cavalry, probably to a point exceeding the wildest dreams of the gentlemen who wrote the memorandum, and having written, hoped for the best. It was enough for him that he was supported, and that it looked likely that the machine-gun would fire no more.

He did not delay.

"Stand to your horses! . . . Get mounted!"

The ground was better.

"Gallop!"

Flanking troops were ahead of him, but the machine-gun gave no more trouble, and the way was comparatively clear. They were not yet beyond the ground which had been heavily shelled, and the gallop was a wildly irregular affair, a business of darting round holes, leaping straggling ditches, splashing through mud, jumping over dead Boches, and plunging heavily up and down. But still they did plunge wildly on, and ever the ground became easier.

But although the actual surface was better, the number of natural obstacles began to increase. Also signs of resistance began to appear. Opposite the point where Jarvis's troop was leading, the artillery and infantry attack appeared almost to have obliterated defence. Three widely separated lines of trench had been crossed, but now they were approaching a fourth line. Dead and dying Boches were fewer, but living men appeared darting hither and thither, and men in holes allowed the cavalry to pass over and shot from behind.

Along a road to the left flank Jarvis thought he detected lines of men advancing. Ahead to the right a battery was firing from a concealed position, but the flashes of the guns could be seen. The men on the right were suffering under the fire. Glancing in that direction Jarvis saw that a considerable number of the squadron had disappeared, but he still led on.

He saw no officers near him. His orders were to attack, harass, and destroy men, material, and guns, wherever they could be found, and generally to prepare the way for the infantry. The exact nature and amount of work to be done had been left to the discretion of commanders, and Jarvis discovered himself apparently to be his own commander.

Away out to the left he could see galloping horses. To the right, also, he saw galloping horses, but on both sides there were considerable blanks between. Some troops were advancing in open formation. Others, compelled either by the nature of the ground or on grounds of tactics settled by their immediate leaders, were advancing in half sections.

But the one thing that appeared to Jarvis before everything was that everywhere troops were galloping or trotting, but always moving as fast as circumstances would allow. His own mare was going splen-

didly and his troop following well, so he too kept going.

Suddenly a rattle of rifle or machine-gun fire broke out from the road about eight hundred yards to his left. At the same moment he saw cavalry to his left dismounting in a ditch and making their horses lie down.

The enemy fire had been directed at the cavalry on his left, and his own troop had not suffered. The enemy battery on the right was still firing, and there were no cavalry near them. They were apparently ignoring his small troop of men.

The whole situation flashed through his mind in an instant as he was riding on. To charge the road meant destruction; to lie down probably meant slower destruction; to go back was not to be thought of; to attack the battery was his best hope.

Perhaps his troop was obscured from view in the battery position, because he was well to their flank; and their fire was customarily directed, no doubt, at very different targets, or possibly the number of his troop was obscured in the muddle of battle, and was thought to be insignificant.

Whatever the reasons, he and his troop kept riding unmolested.

It was his scheme to attack in flank.

When he was within a hundred yards of being abreast of the battery, he shouted the order, "Half right wheel!"

The troop swung round. A few seconds later he shouted again, "Half right wheel!"

When the wheel was complete, his troop were riding straight for the flank of the battery.

At last the enemy deigned to pay them attention. Two guns flashed. The obvious intention was to strike

or terrorise, but the action was futile. Crack! Crack! Rifles began to fire, but the shooting was bad, and begun too late.

Bullets also began to whistle from behind, coming from the road, but no man was hit.

"Charge!" he yelled.

The men gathered their horses under them, and urged them to a last and greater effort. Mr Jarvis, with twenty furious troopers, whirled on to the battery position.

At the moment of attack the position was curious. Whatever the reason, the Hun gunners were completely surprised. Their guns were placed in positions well covered from view and well adapted for firing purposes and for withdrawal; but there was little in the way of defence available when attacked from the rear flank, as he was now doing. And probably that was the explanation of the surprise. They had seen considerable numbers of cavalry go down under their fire, and thought it impossible that so trifling a number from a comparatively distant point would dare to attack them. Also, they should have been protected by the rifle fire of the men advancing on the road.

But despite all these military reasons and assumptions, which they were well entitled to make, Mr Jarvis and his twenty horsemen were there in undeniably ferocious form, whirling their swords and yelling like madmen.

Even at the moment of attack, some of the gunners were in the act of pulling rifles out of corners. For once the artful Hun had been caught napping.

The whole charge was over in five minutes. Down the rear of those guns went the howling twenty-one, cutting and slashing, or riding down men without any cutting at all.

Some of the gunners ran into dug-outs, others ran under the cover of their guns.

The "dug-out" movement appeared to him suspicious. "Six rear men, bomb those dug-outs!" he yelled.

That was the last straw. It was the one act which the Hun had hoped the cavalry would be unable to perform, but they had calculated wrong. The six rear men hastily dismounted, placed their horses carefully behind the dug-outs under the charge of one of their number, and then began the process of "smoking out the wasps."

Two bombs were enough. The wasps came out meekly, and with upraised hands implored surrender.

Jarvis ordered the sergeant to line them all up without arms. Meantime he himself gazed around on the country for a moment.

What he saw there convinced him rapidly.

On his former left flank a dismounted cavalry action was proceeding with intermittent rifle fire. To the right he could see nothing. Perhaps the cavalry were ahead, or perhaps they had returned. Behind him, from the direction of the road, he could see men with rifles stealing across the field towards the gun position.

"Turn men on to destroy these guns!" he yelled. "Wish to heaven I knew more about guns and how to destroy them better," he muttered. "Smash them, batter them, take away the intricate parts, do what you like, but anyway destroy them!"

The men got on with the good work. When they had done, whether the methods employed were orthodox gun destruction methods or not, there was at least a certainty that none of these guns would fire again for many weeks, if at all.

Immediately after, the troop got mounted. He noticed that cavalry were falling back on other parts of the field, and as there were evident signs of the enemy gathering in strength all around, it seemed to him only reasonable to conform.

A few stray troopers had joined his troop, and it was now nearly thirty strong.

Mr Jarvis did not think that, having done so much useful work, it would be a good thing to be shot in the back on the way home.

He accordingly ordered two prisoners to march one on each side of every horseman, and he announced in a very loud voice that if any man attempted to escape he would be shot.

He went back comparatively slowly, as the prisoners had to walk the journey, but the number of bullets fired at his troop was not large. Why the Germans did not think it their duty to shoot both prisoners and captors on this occasion was never known to Mr Jarvis. But he was content with the result.

When the infantry who had advanced considerably saw Mr Jarvis's homecoming, with a number of very sulky Hun gunners stodging glumly to the British lines, they laughed and made unsympathetic remarks.

"Go on, fatty, step it like a man. Ye've got twelve miles hard to do yet! . . . Go on, Fritz. Keep yer pecker up. The cavalry 'll make ye run when ye get to the road!"

A few of the Huns smiled in a hesitatingly ingratiating way, but the majority perspired onwards to captivity, and remained glum, or gazed round with apprehension.

When Mr Jarvis got back to the picket lines he patted his mare's neck and murmured, "Well done, old girl!"

Another cavalryman who had not been in the charge approached. "Any luck?" he said.

"Six guns and a handful of Boche!"

"Good egg!"

"Might have been more, but we lost a lot of men with M.G. and artillery fire."

"Did it all with your own little lot?"

"Pretty much. They're a good lot."

"Yes. Well, I expect you'll be receiving a purple and white ornament for this."

"That'll be nice," said Mr Jarvis cynically. The processes of war had tended to engender cynicism in his mind.

"What became of the rest of the cavalry?"

"Don't very well know. There were a few conducting a dismounted retiring action on my flank. The last I saw of the rest they were careering and galloping all over the place under squadron or troop commanders. They disappeared into the mist, and I expect every one carried on as I did."

"Well, if every troop did-in six guns there'll be a respectable total."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Mr Jarvis.

"What a hope!" said his cavalry friend.

"What a hope!" echoed Mr Jarvis smilingly, but behind his smile he felt anxious about the major and other members of the squadron.

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From the full report of the proceeding which came before the General and Colonel Berdelin, it appeared that by the joint action of cavalry and infantry the line had been advanced to an average depth of about two miles, while 140 guns and many minor weapons had been captured and others destroyed. Certain points of great tactical value had been successfully seized by

the cavalry, but it had not been everywhere possible to hold these points long enough to enable the infantry to make good.

Without those squadrons and troops of hard-riding cavalry manœuvring to a large extent under gentlemen of the same sporting disposition as Mr Jarvis, these results would certainly not have been achieved.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GREAT AMALGAM.

THE second day of the great push was Sunday. Nothing perhaps can illustrate more effectively the extraordinary nature and workings of war than a glance around on various scenes of action in the field and elsewhere on that day.

On the German side there was not a trace of alteration on the usual fighting programme, but there was a desperate mixture of confusion and organisation intermixed — organisation striving furiously to fill the trenches and stop the rout, confusion in the shape of terrified men moving they knew not whither, dying officers no longer controlling, staff officers desperately striving to replace and reform. Death and wounds had taken away the men who could reform, and there was nothing for it but replacement.

At Army Headquarters a broken general struggled in muddled fashion and with a sort of desperation to do things that might avail something. Colonel Kreissler paid no attention to General von Bissingen at all, but practically informed him of what orders were to be issued. Colonel Kreissler was no longer troubling much about von Bissingen. He had served him for a time, but he knew that the ruthless efficiency of war and German Headquarters would have him replaced, and he

had secured secret information that General Marburg was already on the way to take command. Marburg was known to Colonel Kreissler, and the colonel thought it was time for him to look after his own fortunes. He reflected that von Bissingen had always been a fool, propped up by Colonel Kreissler and others, and that he had got what he deserved. The whole point that Colonel Kreissler was interested about was the position of his own fortunes. He thought Headquarters knew that the weak figure was Bissingen, and with Marburg's arrival he hoped to save himself and not go down with the sinking ship.

Bissingen dimly realised the change in his subordinate's attitude, but was too worried to care. At intervals he struggled with ideas as to reporting the situation. It was an easy matter to bluff the enemy press by talking of "retiring according to plan," but it was an entirely different thing to bluff General Headquarters, who knew there was no intention of retiring.

A few miles farther along General von Dressler smiled slightly to himself, while at the same time carefully occupied with the defensive measures required on his own front and flanks. He was a good fighting general, but he cared very little about the loss of a few thousand men or some miles of ground, so long as it finished Bissingen.

He knew that although little or no allowance would be made to von Bissingen for the fact that it was probably the case that his army, holding what had been considered to be a safe part of the line, was partly composed of the poorer elements of the German Army, the very stuff considered best suited for "cannon fodder," and so Dressler reflected coolly that the fatherland was merely getting rid of riff-raff. It was in reality a fair all-round army, but Dressler, whether from prejudice

against Bissingen and disbelief in his command, and the discipline maintained in his army, or merely to suit his argument, classed the army as riff-raff. At the same time he felt that his own value was enhanced, and good general though he was, he realised that the times were risky, and behaved even such as considered themselves supermen to walk warily.

A little later on the same day at the Army Headquarters across the line General Drakelin and Colonel Berdelin sat together working continuously. By the reports coming from every branch of the service—from the air above, from the earth beneath, and from beneath the earth, by foot, by wire, by horse, by motor, by wing and signal—the news had come which showed that the push had so far been completely successful except at one point. The order had been issued to those concerned for immediate concentration of every gun available, and for the hurling of a fresh division against the disputed point.

Both general and colonel felt that it was a time to spare nothing. There wanted but that one point. If it were taken the whole push could move forward again on the succeeding days without hindrance. Untaken, all their efforts might be wasted. It was one of the chances of war, and they were anxious but yet working coolly. The general had confidence in the new division, and believed they would carry out the work. But if not, another division must go in, and that second division was already on the way, although they might not be required.

The general had little doubt the place would be taken, but it was the question of time that troubled him. Untaken by six o'clock that day, and the time schedule would fail. They would be behind time and the enemy would have too long to recover. Even already the aero-

planes had brought in the news of trains running almost continuously and troops being detrained about four miles in rear of the scene of action. The bombing planes had been sent out and were no doubt attacking them, but even so the enemy planes were putting up a fight, and also were hourly arriving in greater numbers. Also the latest information told of mobile anti-aircraft guns arriving and putting up a fierce barrage.

Every minute lost meant a gain to the enemy and lessening of power to the attackers.

Time was vital.

At a Divisional Headquarters there was one happy general. His division had done their work and more. They had gone from drive to drive and victory to victory. The casualties on the second day had been heavier, and that was the only thing that saddened him. He realised almost a sense of personal loss at the thought of all those splendid men he had sent up who were no more. And yet by his principles he believed firmly in the glory of their death.

He had no fear at all about their holding what they had got. He believed in them to such an extent that he had been heard to say, "If there were one man of my Grampian Division ordered to hold a position and he saw a Prussian army corps advancing to attack, that man would fight and die there rather than go back." And General Halgrave's Division actually were the embodiment of the principles he himself had preached to them, and for which they readily fought. The Grampians and their general were one and indivisible. They believed in him and he believed in them.

In their success he gloried. In the day of disaster which had once come upon them he had been known to lay his head on his hands and weep. He had actually

refused an army corps in order that he might be allowed to stay with his beloved division. And they had allowed it.

There are such generals, though not many.

The roads behind the battlefields had grown steadily worse. The enormous pressure of horse, motor, gun, and foot traffic pouring steadily backwards and forwards took daily toll in wear and tear, and on that Sunday the busses coming up loaded with men reeled even more dangerously than before; while the men and horses struggled wearily on through the never-ending mud as they toiled forward to reach the field. These were mostly men of the fresh divisions for the second push, due to start on the following morning. By night-time every division that had fought was to be relieved. On the morrow the whole line composed of fresh divisions was to go forward again.

To support the second great push the gunners were toiling and moiling continuously, especially men of the horse and field gun units, to get their guns dragged forward into new positions. The task was almost superhuman, but discipline the all-triumphant prevailed, and men who had had no sleep worth mentioning for days goaded themselves forward, reeling at their tasks and wellnigh speechless, but always getting on. The shelling which they endured was just then not too severe, because so many of the enemy guns had been outed by fire or by the cavalry. The thought of the chance so afforded made them struggle all the more desperately, and gunners muttered to themselves hoping they were near the end of the war. With every heave at the wheels they murmured, "This time!" This time did not mean merely a turn at the wheel which would take the gun out of a trough; it meant also that there was a possibility of a turn in the war, and they were heaving

their "damnedest" so that their share in bringing that happy turn might not be wanting. When they got up to their positions men were so exhausted that when their turn of relief, if any, came, they simply dropped in the mud beside the gun and fell asleep. If the gun fired that was not their job; they did not wake.

The men of the divisions waiting to come up for the third push and relieve the second push men were at peace stationed in villages a dozen or so miles behind. The village bells tinkled and the men paraded for church under the officers detailed.

The other officers remained cheerfully in bed, from which tranquil position they surveyed the world apparently in no way ruffled by the fact that they were going into the great push two days later. They, however, felt justified in resting a little longer in bed, in view of the fact that they would get little or no rest during the push. Being unable to get the benefit of church music, lovers of music ordered that the batmen should turn on the gramophone with soothing Sunday strains such as "Where that Swanee ribber flows."

At church the chaplains made their customary appeal for men desiring to partake of holy communion prior to entering battle.

The French villagers, mostly clad in black, made their way quietly to their own church. On their way they turned occasionally and stopped for an instant to listen to the low rumble of the distant guns. They were accustomed to that sound, but even custom could not altogether dim the strangeness of the thing on that peaceful Sunday. To those people in black the noise symbolised that terrible something which existed up there just a few miles off, where men lay dead and dying in the mud, where desperate encounters took place, where

blood flowed, and where there was that intangible unknown which the papers call "carnage." It was up there that their sons and brothers died. It was from there that the ambulance cars with the wounded whizzed through the village. Sometimes the strange thing came even nearer when a casual shell or bomb was dropped in the neighbourhood.

Across the Channel, in northern villages, scenes curiously alike were being enacted. The church bells tinkled, and the people, many in black, gathered there too. At Pilsavie, little Mrs Ferintosh walked quietly to the church with her Bible under her arm. She sang with the rest the old hymn—

"O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come."

As she sang, her thoughts were with her son Angus; but she did not know that at the very moment while she sang there was being conferred upon her sorrow and glory. Angus was gasping out his life in a pool of water, after performing one of the heroic acts of the war.

Only two months later she was destined to see his name in the roll of the immortals that hung in the village church. Ever after she was to look quickly twice every Sunday, morning and evening, at that wonderful name, and all her neighbours were to say about her: "Poor Mrs Ferintosh! She lost her son. . . . But he won the V.C."

She was destined to pass away to another world sooner, perhaps, than she might have done had her Angus come back, but she held her head up proudly to the last. When she laid it down, she thought

death a friend—since death has no terrors for the simple, the brave, and the weary.

In simpleness of heart she had given her son to the war, her few spare sixpences to the certificates, her tears and her prayers to God. When she went away she had nothing more left to give, but perhaps she had unconsciously laid up treasure in heaven greater than many politicians.

At the same hour that Mrs Ferintosh was still singing her hymns, the choir-boys in English cathedrals were chanting their wonderful notes—

“Praise to the Holiest in the heights.”

Clergymen were preaching according to their taste on fortitude, resolution, humility, &c. Within these churches things were so peaceful there might have been no war; but outside in the great cities the news-boys were exhibiting boards in the streets, showing—“Great British Victory. Enemy driven back seven miles. Cavalry in action.”

While at the stations men were packing into trains for the Channel ports, and boats with standing room only were conveying men across by the thousand.

Out by Richmond and Kew people were taking the air as usual, and on the battle-front in Flanders many were taking such air as they could get through their “gaspirators,” while their brows were aching with the strain of the mask-bands and face-pieces, their eyes saw dully through the oft-cleaned eye-pieces, and their mouths were foaming with prolonged effort.

As strange, perhaps, as anything else was the gay persiflage of subalterns three or four miles behind the lines, whom the gas did not, but whom it might, affect.

They joked, these boys, about the very thing that

might produce their death when they went up in the push a few days later.

At 3 P.M. on that Sunday two of them, having an afternoon siesta, suddenly burst from their camp-beds, rushed to the tent door, and put their heads through the flaps of the tent.

Having done so, they remained with stifled breath for a few seconds, while they gazed around suspiciously. They saw nothing unusual in the camp. Finally they turned to gaze at each other, with a suspicious look in their eyes.

"Methought I heard the gas-gong!" said the first.

"I heard thee say so," said the second.

"Thinkest thou the atmosphere is laden with the noxious vapours of a gas?"

"I think not," said No. 2 coldly.

"Smellest thou the fumes of that vile gas—the horrid diphenylehlorarsine?"

"I smell it not."

"Smellest thou phosgene?"

"I smell it not."

"Smellest thou that mustard dope—the dichlorethyl sulphide?"

"I sniff it not."

Pause—solemn pause.

"Then there *is* no gas?"

"There is not."

"There *was* no gas-gong?"

"There was not."

"And no alarm?"

"None, varlet!"

"Then, 'tis false?"

"Yes, 'tis false; and thou hast falsely waked me from my slumber—foul gas fiend! Avaunt! Have at thee!"

In another instant a furious friendly scrimmage is added to the total of the world's war, carried on within the restricted area of the tent at the imminent risk of all their belongings.

The scrimmage over, they revert to the horizontal position.

Quaint, is it not?

If the Hun could see and understand some of these things, he would give up expecting to win the war, for it never occurs to these youngsters to think the war will not be won by them. They merely wonder how long it will be.

Despite their joking, it is perhaps needless to say that had there been a proper gas alarm they would have had their respirators on with all speed.

In the evening of that Sunday the divisions of the first round came out.

As the result of the successfulness of the push they had many miles farther to come back than they had had to march on coming up.

Captain Hazlitt's company, all that was left of them, came down slowly.

When the incoming men had passed in and all the duties had been done, then men who had tramped and fought and dug, dragged their weary limbs away step by step. They had hardly known what sleep was during these days of push. Their food had been scanty despite the greatest endeavours to supply.

— They were very weary, but they were dogged, and they were going out to rest.

At the same time at which they were going down, streams of men from other battalions were also pouring down the roads and across the fields.

It was another of the extraordinary scenes of war.

It was a much lighter night than the previous one, and if the enemy artillery had been active they would have reaped a tremendous harvest. But the enemy artillery had been demoralised for the time.

However there was not an officer in the division who did not know that there was considerable risk in so many men being on the same ground. But what could they do?

Reliefs had been arranged at different hours, but what of that? In the new positions the up-coming forces had trouble in finding their particular places, and there was inevitable delay, so that reliefs arranged to happen separately happened all together.

These are the things that generals who have arranged everything beautifully don't always hear about, so long as casualties are not too heavy.

So men crushed and heaved along till they came to the only road which they couldn't all enter at once, and the thing became a shouting assemblage. "Stand fast the Garelochs! March on the Moultschires! Forward there! Keep together!"

The men stood wearily in that vast star-lit queue. They were too tired to say much, but they muttered in a queer conglomeration of English, Scotch, and Irish voices, with a few colonial turns thrown in, "Howly Moses, are they goin' to keep us here all night!"

Eventually the road cleared sufficiently, and they crowded down in slow sequence.

Tramp, tramp, shuffle, slosh—these were the feet of the conquerors slowly dragging back to rest.

When Captain Hazlitt's company got back to the advanced camp, they found the cooks waiting with steaming tea for every man. They drank their tea, and then lay down in their tents to rest.

At ten o'clock on the following morning, every man left was on parade fairly cleaned up, shaved, and ready to march back to the places where the buses were waiting to take them down to rest.

When the colonel saw Captain Hazlitt's company on parade, he was silent. At last he said, "Is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

The colonel stared for a time. He had been present four times as colonel at scenes just like that. He said, "I thought we hadn't paid so dear this time!"

"There are sixty-two men on parade, sir."

"Yes, and two hundred and thirty in the battalion."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, we've done our share again, anyhow," said the colonel. "March."

An hour later they were on the buses, and rushing back to green fields again.

On the way down, the hospital where Maisie Herbert was working was already busy with wounded from the new divisions.

At the rest billets, Captain Hazlitt met Travers, who had been left in charge of details.

"A great show, old man!" said Travers, who had heard the news.

"Yes," said Hazlitt. "The men fought splendidly."

Travers stared. In his enthusiasm he had for a moment forgotten. The queer stilted sound in Hazlitt's voice made him remember, and he held out his hand.

"Neither Billie or Trevelyan are badly wounded," he said by way of consolation.

"No," said Hazlitt, "but we've lost a lot of good men." He spoke rather gloomily.

"Old man, you're tired," said Travers. "You've forgotten that you've won a great victory."

"Yes, but always the price!"

"Ah, you're too tired now, old man, to stand up to it. Think of Halgrave and his advice. 'If it falls to many of your men to pay the price of truth and freedom, strengthen yourselves with the thought that these men die glorious and immortal that the world may be free.'"

"Yes," said Hazlitt.

"Come and have something to eat," said Travers. "You're absolutely done in."

Hazlitt suffered himself to be led off to the mess, where he ate in silence. After he had eaten, he left the running of the company to Travers, and went to bed.

On the following morning he was once again fit and well, and ready to renew the struggle.

Such is war—a great work of destruction and renewal.

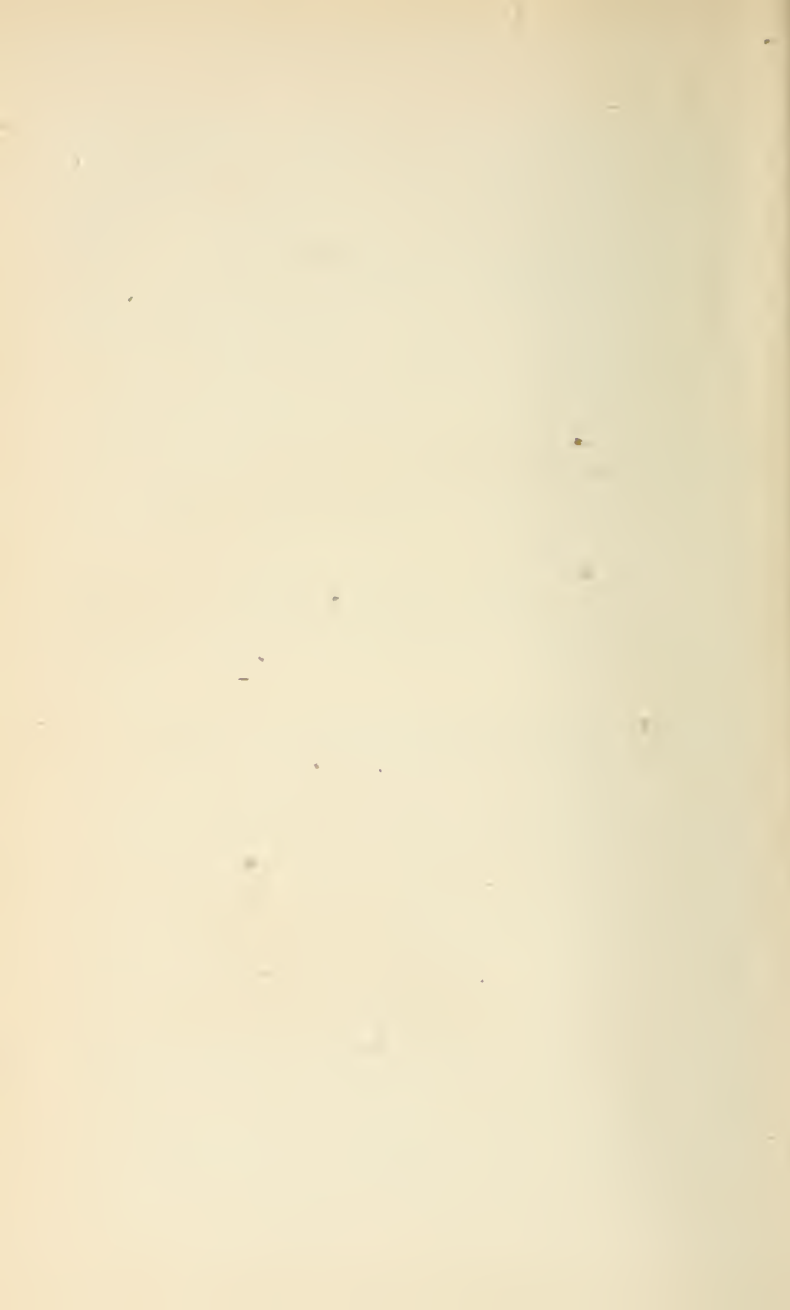
For General Drakelin and Colonel Berdelin there were no days of release, for the push went on continuously for them with ever new divisions.

Almost every other type of commander was rested for a time, but the army commander and his staff had to see the whole thing through, and the tale in these pages is only the beginning of a push which was to last into months. Useless to go through the workings of a second, third, fourth, tenth, or twentieth round. The same sort of things happened in all manner of phases, and with cunningly-devised changes. Shrapnel barrages became "bouncing" barrages, "bouncing" became "drag-net," "drag-net" changed back into "straightforward," "straightforward" gave way to attack without artillery preparation at all, and so on.

Adaptation, change, and device went on continuously in the hands of the general and his staff, and all the thought and labour expended were not without reward, for even the strategy of Marburg and Dressler, prompted by the genius of Ludendorff, were unavailing to stem the tide of victory.

On the completion of the battle, Colonel Berdelin's map was altered so that he actually smiled.

— THE END.



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